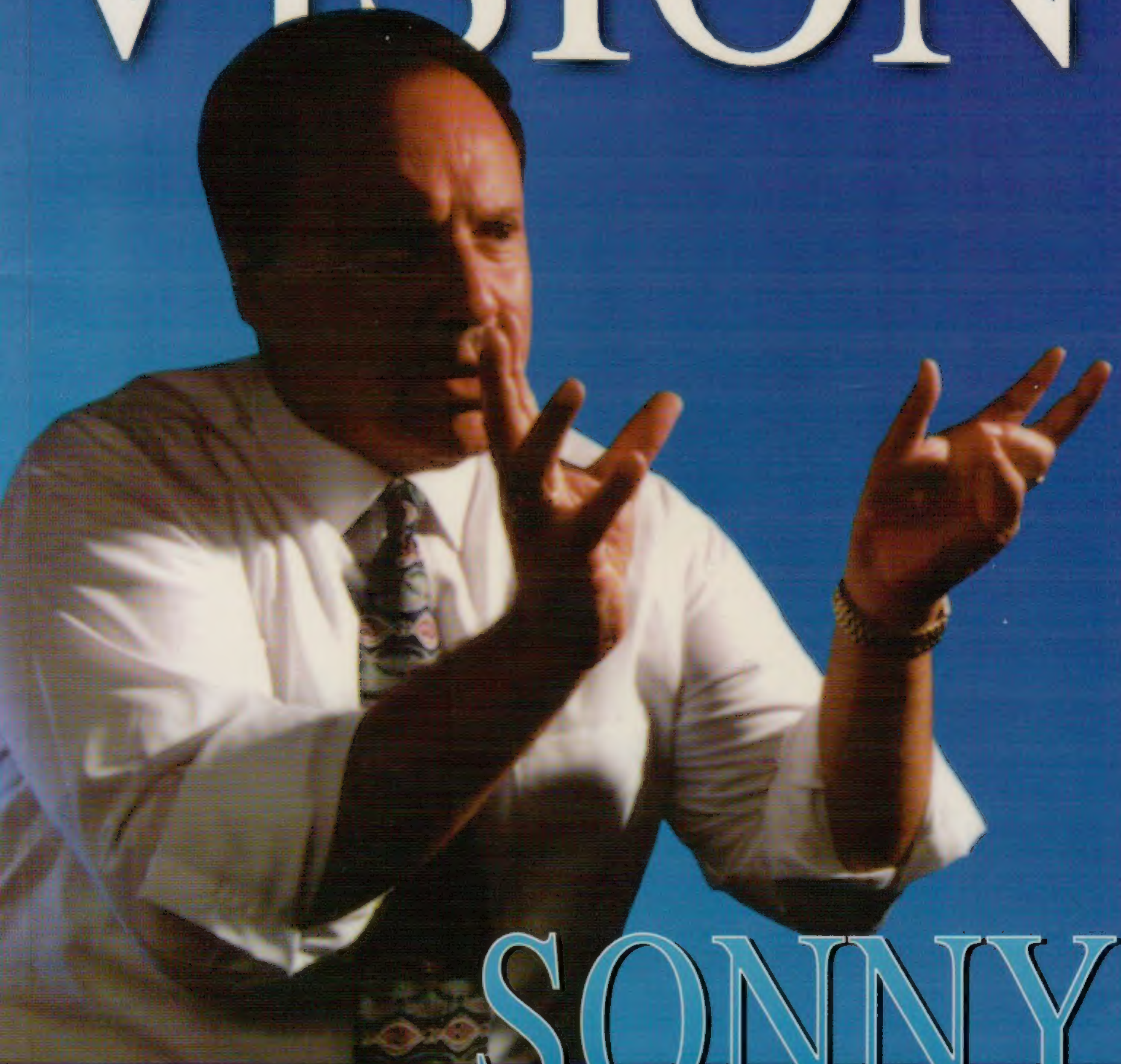


INTERNALIZING *The* VISION



SONNY
ARGUINZONI

Internalizing the Vision

Special Thanks to:

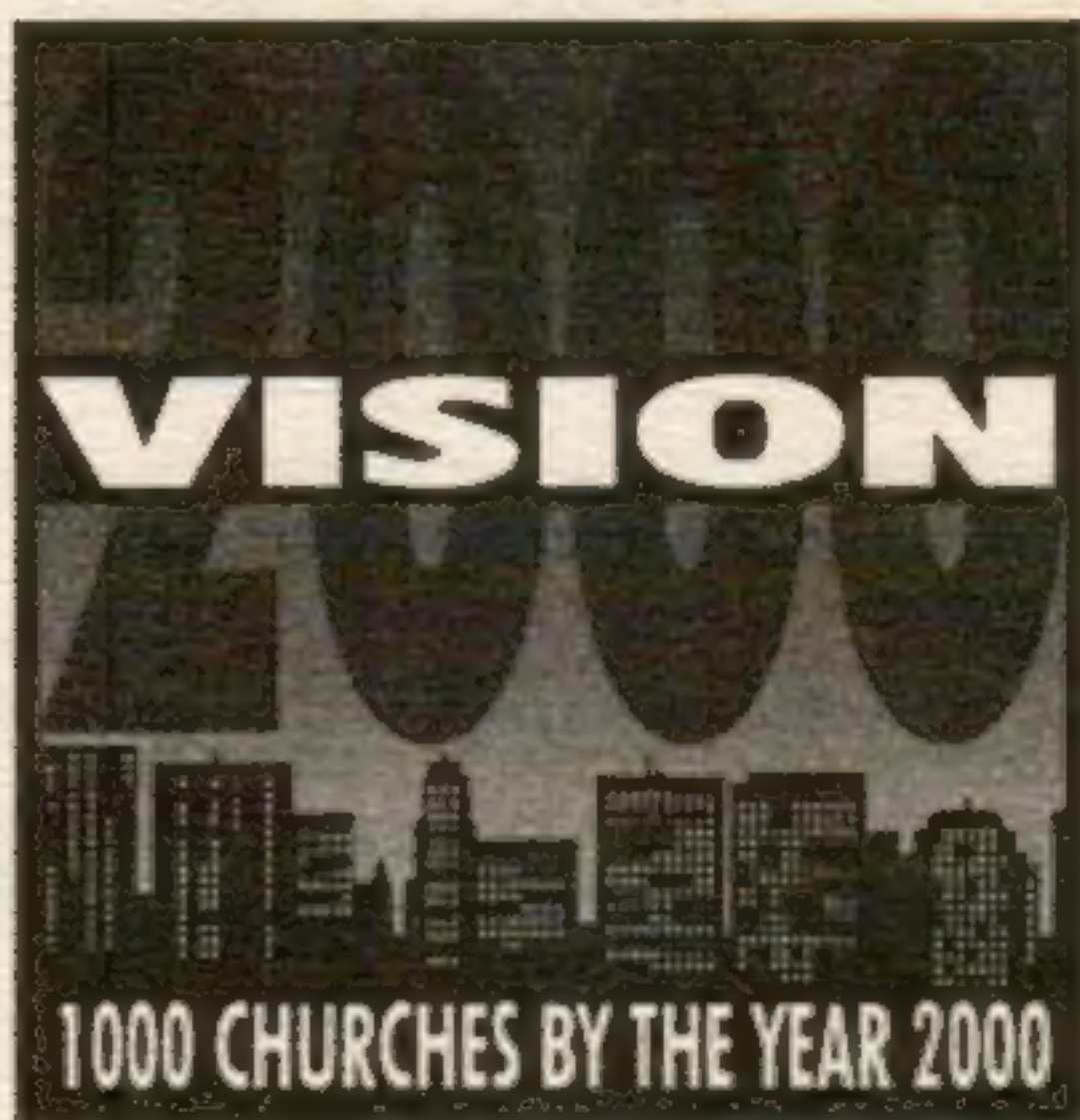
Tom Burton, Maynard Black and Joesy Pineda.
Without your tireless efforts, this book would
not have become a reality.

DEDICATED to the elders, pastors, evangelists
and workers of Victory Outreach who have
internalized the vision — and are laboring in
the harvest fields of our inner cities.

Because you have taken the vision into your
hearts and lives, you have become transmitters
of the vision. And so it is that we have been
able to see thousands of lives of men and
women rescued and transformed worldwide.
Because of you, the vision has become a reality.

Internalizing The Vision

Sonny Arguinzoni



VP
Publications

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VICTORY OUTREACH MISSION STATEMENT

Victory Outreach is an international church-oriented Christian Ministry called to the task of evangelizing and discipling the hurting people of the world with the message, hope and plan of Jesus Christ. This call involves a commitment to plant and develop churches, rehabilitation homes and training centers in strategic cities of the world. Victory Outreach inspires and instills within people the desire to fulfill their potential in life with a sense of dignity, belonging and destiny. Victory Outreach works cooperatively with others of mutual purpose in accomplishing the task before us.

Introduction

By the millions they come, the ambitious and the downtrodden of the world, drawn by the strange magnetism of urban life. For centuries the progress of civilization has been defined by the growth of cities. By the year 2000, more than 50 percent of humankind will live in cities, including 21 megacities of more than 10 million people.

— Time magazine

Catch a joyous vision for our world's great cities! Learn how one ministry is taking the Great Commission to the dangerous streets today — in a dynamic way not seen since the days of Jesus' disciples.

What is the secret of this inner city outreach? Victory Outreach is raising up mighty preachers from the gang-infested ghettos of the inner cities worldwide. How do they do it? Because of their sincere concern for people. Unlovable people. Society's throwaways — the same discards and illiterates that Jesus sent forth to shake up the world.

Come, learn and be inspired. Sonny Arguinzoni came to Jesus during David Wilkerson's early *The Cross and the Switchblade* days in the dangerous ghettos of New York. Today, Sonny proves nobody is unredeemable. In his churches, there are former hit-men, drug pushers, pros-

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titutes, thieves, con-artists, and even “good” religious people who have internalized the same vision that the Lord gave Sonny — evangelizing the great cities, discipling, training and sending forth hundreds of preachers, evangelists and world missionaries.

Come, catch the vision with Victory Outreach!

Make it yours.

Internalize this wondrous vision!

Chapter 1

A rejected woman

I want to share some hard facts with you.

America is already a godly nation, isn't it? Our money says "In God We Trust" on it. The Pledge of Allegiance proclaims "... one nation under God," right?

Well, sociology researcher Kirk Hadaway says only about 35 percent of Americans attend church regularly. The Gallup Poll puts the figure at 42 percent. That means that on any typical Sunday, 147 million to 165 million Americans are spending the morning sleeping late, jogging, reading the newspaper or flipping TV channels.

Out on the streets of Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Chicago, Houston and various other American cities, there are untold thousands sleeping off their Saturday night drunk — or waking, trembling from their last drug high.

Why aren't these people in church?

They don't like church. They are disinterested in lis-

tening to sermons. Many pray — 91 percent of American women and 85 percent of men say they do. However, many are unsure just “Who” is listening up there. They distrust preachers.

Why? The typical church leader today has little or no idea of what is going on in the hearts and minds of what author Charles Colson refers to as America’s first “post-Christian” generation.

Too many Christians hide in the safe Christian subculture. They take pride in not having anything to do with people who don’t go to church. Many have an *us-versus-them* attitude about non-Christians. They don’t understand them, they can’t relate to them and they don’t like them. In short, they see the unchurched as the enemy.

Yet, quiz any unchurched person and the majority will tell you they are a believer. Many will claim they have made a “personal commitment” to Jesus Christ at some time in their life.

Many have rejected the church, but not God. They don’t understand Christianity, yet they are confused about what they do believe — and what they have rejected.

They distrust rules. It’s not enough that “the Bible tells me so.” Only 13 percent of Americans say they still believe in all the Ten Commandments. Many make up their own. This requires tremendous mental and emotional energy and often leads to false guilt and personal confusion. They really cannot decide what is right and what is wrong.

The Bible tells of a time in history when there were no rules and “every man did what was right in his own eyes.”

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The Lord had chosen, as the leader of Israel, a young man named Samson. God had given Samson incredible abilities. However, if you read the story in the Book of Judges, chapters 13 through 16, you will see that Samson may have been supernaturally strong. However, he was one of the worst disappointments in human history.

He was called of the Lord to rescue His people from evil. Instead, Samson was destroyed by his own lusts and fell victim to his own moral weakness. As a result, he died horribly, leaving the ancient Israelites without a leader.

In the vacuum, the people did terrible, wicked things, deluding themselves into believing that idol worship was godly, engaging in murderous sexual perversions, and even turning against one another in a genocidal civil war. The book of Judges ends in Chapter 21:25 saying Israel was in total chaos without a leader and, “every man did what was right in his own eyes.”

And that is where the world is today. Millions today are doing just whatever is right in their own eyes. In the end, that’s a pretty hard way to live. As a result, they are morally adrift.

Yet secretly, they yearn for an anchor.

They want something to believe in.

Without God, we humans do not have the ability to set decent and honorable rules. Our Creator gave us an instruction manual. Answers to successful living compose the Bible.

Yet, most Americans have been trained by our popular culture to resist authority. Eighty-one percent of today’s youth don’t believe there’s an absolute truth, says

Christian pollster George Barna.

They are convinced that there's "your" truth and then there's "my" truth. That means there's no truth at all.

Today's unchurched are also convinced that churchgoers will reject them. They believe TV's image of the negative, judgmental and condescending "church lady" and the stern, disapproving, hypocritical clergyman who is shocked speechless by Beavis and Butthead.

The importance of music and TV in their lives is astonishing. VCRs, 24 hours of TV music videos, Walkmans, CD players, and channel surfing are all part of the air they breathe.

They feel betrayed by commercial advertising's false claims and empty guarantees. They expect politicians to lie. Preachers, too. If the Gospel is to reach them, we need more than nice words and attractive packaging. What we claim had better be true — not just trite phrases from a tract on soul-winning.

Today's unchurched have been burned by so many broken promises that they want to know the bottom line.

They want to deal with the facts head-on. You had better be able to explain the Four Spiritual Laws in terms of your own real experience with Jesus Christ. A memorized sales pitch will fall on deaf ears.

You and I must be unafraid of making ourselves transparent about our own past, our own personal struggles and our own doubts. Today's generation is drawn far more by someone's honest failure than by their empty claims of success.

In our times of desperate trouble, today's unchurched will accept help from Christians — often warily and usu-

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ally after the welfare system and the courts have failed them ... and only if we get there before the Moonies, Mormons, Hare Krishnas and Charlie Mansons.

Nowhere is this more true than in Los Angeles.

There are parts of this vast city — which I call my home — where violence reigns, wreaking havoc daily with the lives of community residents and increasingly spilling over into downtown and residential middle-class areas. Muggings, burglaries, carjackings, and drug-related shootings are everyday occurrences in some neighborhoods.

My beloved city is under perpetual attack because respect for rules and the law has collapsed. Amid the fallout of rampant drug abuse and drug trafficking, there is a lack of hope for the future. Despair is pervasive.

I see street women whose children fend for themselves, foraging for food and money any way they can get it. The children are sometimes employed by drug dealers, becoming addicted themselves or are pulled into gangs. These children of the street, growing up with little supervision, are said to “come up hard.” They often learn to fight at an early age, using short-tempered, angry adults around them as their role models.

Such a boy came into our lives whom I will just call “Tagger.” In order to protect his privacy, I am changing minor details of his story.

He is 12 years old, yet has obscene gang tattoos on his neck and an ugly knife-fight scar that curls wickedly up one shoulder, bordered by the pinpricks of a doctor’s stitches.

In the East Los Angeles neighborhood where he grew

up, almost every wall, gate, garage door and fence is scrawled with graffiti marking it as gang territory. Many of the streets are barricaded to combat open drug sales.

Gunfire is common.

Gang members take over vacant apartments.

Here it can be fatal to hold eye contact too long with a stranger — they may jump to the conclusion that you are “dissing” him or her... disrespecting them. Their angry response can come from the barrel end of a gun.

Last summer, Tagger’s brother Willie, 15, was killed in the family’s living room, shot six times by rival gang members firing through the front window.

“Every day I think about you and I feel sad,” Tagger wrote in Willie’s remembrance book at the funeral home. “I’m going to take my tattoos off my neck and I’m not going to be with the gang no more because I don’t want to be shot, too.”

Shortly after the murder, Tagger went with his mother to a middle-class town we will call Centerville. It was her birthplace — where she had grown up. Here she had worked in a chemical plant’s employee laundry until she left, at age 19, with a man who abandoned her, alone, in Los Angeles, when he was finished with her.

At Willie’s funeral, Tagger told his mother that he wanted to start his life over.

She thought Centerville would be a good place to do it. However, Tagger had a rough time finding his place. His distinctive graffiti signature, a highly stylized scrawl in spray paint or felt-tip ink, quickly festooned Centerville surfaces — including phone booths, the fenders of police cars, the windows of the school bus, bank building

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walls, store windows — you name it.

Within days of arriving in Centerville, his “tag,” as he called it, could be seen defacing a number of billboards, the football scoreboard and all four overpasses in town. He considered it a sport — seeing how many high-visibility places or “heavens” he could “tag.”

Local officials considered it malicious vandalism.

His mother forced him to go to the church where she had once attended Vacation Bible School. However, as an adult, she no longer fit. Her clothes, dowdy by Los Angeles standards, stood out at the conservative, small-town church. It was rumored that she was a prostitute — although she was not. She was not made to feel welcome.

After Tagger took to drinking and getting high with older local youths and not coming home at night, the preacher came by for a visit. He said that at church Tagger fought with other children, intimidated the Sunday school teachers and interrupted youth meetings, bragging of his gang exploits. The pastor told Tagger’s mother that the board of deacons wanted her to keep Tagger away until he cleaned himself up — for the sake of the good kids.

You could argue that Tagger is the product of a nation self-destructing; that our self-centered society has failed him or that he has been damaged by neglect and street life.

To Centerville town officials, Tagger was a dangerous and unwelcome invader, bringing with him a threat of violence, drugs and disrespect for the law. He took up with the worst kids in town, who began to mimic his gangster style of dress and sport similar homemade prison-style tattoos.

Eventually this group took to stealing stereos and sound systems from cars. The thieves would heist the car from a parking lot, then strip it of its entertainment components before dumping it — usually with several new dents and broken windows — in another part of town.

In Tagger's bedroom, the Centerville police found 23 stereos stacked around the walls.

Fearful officials not only expelled him from school, but got a local judge to issue a restraining order that made it a crime for him to even play with other youngsters. The local prosecutor thought Tagger was too young to be charged with receiving stolen goods — but began researching just what could be done legally to rid the town of this boy.

In coffee shops and courthouse discussions, Tagger quickly became a symbol of the modern challenges to their rural outpost, to what remained of the 1950s in their little town, which was struggling to preserve its isolation and serenity. Tagger threatened everything.

The prosecutor finally gave Tagger's mother a choice: get him on the next bus back to Los Angeles or face unspecified legal prosecution — which might result in Tagger ending up at the county prison farm with adults.

She began searching for a place back in Los Angeles that could help her son. For a brief time, Tagger had stayed with families from our church, so she asked if she could send him back here.

I had to ask myself what my responsibility was to this boy.

I believe the Lord has given me a vision for Tagger and the hundreds of thousands out there like him.

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Let me share it with you.

John 4:30-35 in the Bible tells me that:

“They came out of town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?” “My food”, said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest”. (New International Version)

This is an account of Jesus trying to energize His disciples with vision. If you follow the story of Jesus in the New Testament, you find that He did that numerous times. Jesus always had a divine purpose. That’s why in a short ministry of three years, He was able to accomplish so much. His whole life was a life of vision and purpose — and sharing both with those who followed him.

To give you a little bit of a background, Jesus had just finished witnessing to a woman. Many of you know the story. It’s of the woman at the well.

It’s a story that many of us are able to relate to in the inner city. If the Samaritan woman was alive today, what type of church do you think that she would be looking for after her conversion? What type of church do you

think that she would feel comfortable?

I believe she would feel at home in a church or a ministry such as I have devoted my life to — a church that reaches out to the outcasts of society, such as the Taggers of this hurting world.

She had been rejected. She was an outcast. She'd already had five husbands and she wasn't proud of it. She didn't volunteer the details of her past when she talked about herself to Jesus.

That gave Him an opportunity to demonstrate His supernatural power when He said to her, "You've had five husbands and the man you're living with now is not your husband."

That had to jolt her.

I won't recount the whole story, since I suspect you know it. However, I want you to see there was a purpose for Jesus going through Samaria. The Bible says He was on His way to Galilee, but He needed to go through Samaria.

Why?

Because by the time He got to that certain well, there was going to be an adulterous woman who needed His touch, His word, His ministry and His healing.

Furthermore, His disciples needed to learn an important lesson that only this woman could teach them.

Here was a woman who was desperately in need. She was hurting badly. Our Lord felt compassion for her.

So Jesus went and ministered to that woman. She had a personal experience with the long-awaited Messiah, the Prince of Peace, God With Us — Jesus Christ. She received a revelation.

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Whenever anyone receives that kind of revelation, their life is totally transformed.

I don't know how familiar you are with our church or the ministry of Victory Outreach. However, our rehabilitation homes have played a vital role in the more than 200 churches that Victory Outreach has planted in inner cities all across America and in several large cities in Europe, South America and Asia.

Most of our pastors and ministers are graduates of our rehabilitation homes.

We don't come into a city and begin going after the members of other churches. No, our ministry is to the Taggers and their moms and their friends, the outcasts of society — the drug addicts, the gang members, the hurting, the abused, the abandoned and the outcast.

Each church has a rehabilitation home that offers such people a safe place off the street.

This is what's happening in the inner cities worldwide. Yet, many churches are fleeing to the suburbs — just when they are needed in the inner city most.

In the suburbs, ministry is calmer and safer and certainly less of a financial challenge. If you minister to society leaders and corporate executives, a lot more cash will turn up in your offering basket than if you are preaching on the sidewalk to street people going in and out of a liquor store.

The suburbs are not so dangerous for preachers' families, either. Your daughters can take tennis lessons, spend all summer working on a tan and keeping up with the soaps. Your sons can learn to snow ski and explore the World Wide Web on their laptop computers — and your wife can afford the fashions at the mall.

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However, if you minister in the inner city, your kids will play stickball with the children of crack addicts. They will dress out of donation boxes. And your wife will be delighted if somebody in the rehab house is a former hair stylist and can give her a home perm.

But I want you to know that the kids of inner city preachers know what a loving, providing, supernatural God can do. They have seen their parents pray over the mail that there will be a check from somebody the Lord told to send the rent for the rehab house and the groceries.

Those kids have watched and even interceded for the screaming woman trying to get heroin out of her bloodstream as she calls on Jesus to take away her terrible pain.

But taking your family to minister to the inner city is a rough decision that can be made only after much prayer — and only if the Lord gives you a vision for such a ministry.

Chapter 2

Our fields are today's cities

We agreed to let Tagger stay at one of our drug rehabilitation homes for men and to tutor him until he could get into a Christian school.

This, however, would make Tagger a truant, county probation officials told us. They wanted to take custody of him. I do not believe that Tagger needed anything more than Christian love, attention and structure. Shortly after he arrived, Tagger broke a window at our rehab house and left. Today, his future is still a question mark. He is out there — somewhere — in the city.

The city is changing. For one thing, I am seeing migration to an extent that has never occurred before in our history. In Los Angeles, we see the Third World represented every day — Mexico, El Salvador, Haiti, the Philippines, Guatemala, Pakistan, Honduras, India, Panama

and Indonesia are just a few.

America today has the highest percentage of naturalized U.S. citizens of any generation born in the 20th century. Newcomers often bring their pagan religions with them. That's why we see kids having a harder time accepting the idea that without Jesus, their Muslim, Buddhist, or New Age friends will go to hell when they die.

Spirituality is suddenly popular — although the spirituality on TV and in movies seldom includes Jesus Christ. As a result, we used to preach on the streets that there is a God. However, today, the question that we find ourselves having to answer is "Which god do you mean?"

Some of the Eastern cults are very evangelistic. So are the Muslims, particularly sects that reach out to African-Americans. Many are trying to fill the spiritual void that fleeing a Christian church has left with them, and only Jesus is able to fill.

But still our churches flee. Ministering to the hurting is not easy. Churches have very real needs right at their own doorstep and find themselves addressing a gamut of social and economic problems: illegal immigration, drug issues, social problems, corruption in high places — or even worse, public apathy.

The challenge for all Christians today is trusting in the Lord to accomplish the work. All believers need to pour their lives into the needs of the neglected kids, battered wives and defeated dads who are disillusioned. All of us must believe that God is equal to this very challenge. Only He can address the needs of the mentally ill, the demon-possessed and the emotionally troubled.

But how can they meet those needs if fellowships

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remove themselves from the inner cities. Sending money through traditional home missionary agencies is helpful, but it still does not imitate Christ. He requires active involvement and personal contact with people and their needs. Christianity is our life in service, not simply a polite religion with lovely buildings, orthodox theology, pleasing words and soothing rituals.

We Christians must observe the terrible lesson that has been taught the established churches of Latin America. Traditionally, the official church blinked at greed, injustice, corruption and failed to respond to the gentle wind of the Holy Spirit. Now Latin Americans are leaving their traditional parishes at the rate of 400 people every hour, according to some observers.

They are flocking to churches which demonstrate the dynamic truth that God loves them and will heal them — and certainly that He did not retire from involvement with the human race shortly after the Book of Acts was written. What a joy it is to see people from dead, unpowered churches discover that they can actually have a deep relationship with the Almighty Creator of the Universe.

People are invigorated by the truth of God's vibrant, engaging, supernatural love for them — and the joyous comfort and inspiration of the Holy Spirit awakened in their Christian lives. It empowers them to stay and minister in the barrio, the ghetto and "across the tracks" within the dangerous parts of our cities.

Do you know that over one half of the world's population lives in urban centers? Today 80 percent of Americans live in cities. That's 205.7 million people in only 27 percent of America's counties. I have seen predictions

that by the year 2010, three out of every four people on Earth will be living in cities.

In Los Angeles County, it is estimated that there are over 1,000 gangs with a total membership of over 100,000 gang members.

Drugs continue to be a problem. The government experts and programs have not been able to solve the problem. It just changes. One drug is popular, then another. Heroin is a fad for a while, and then is gone, and then cocaine, and then maybe one of those new synthetic drugs.

One half of the world's illegal users are right in our country, the United States of America. That means, worldwide, the U.S. is the greatest market for drug peddlers. America consumes half of the illegal drugs sold worldwide. It's been projected that America's homeless will increase to more than 18 million in the next five years.

I could go on and on with such statistics and the needs that the church faces today.

But the bottom line is that God has called us. We have to reach out to the little Taggers. We have to go talk to today's Woman at the Well.

I believe that when we do, we will find intense fulfillment. Jesus said that He wasn't even hungry after witnessing to the Woman at the Well.

Why did He go out of His way to speak with her? Through His kindness and His compassion for her deep need, He said actions speak much louder than words. *Listen, just as this Samaritan woman is in need, there are many others also in need. Lift up your eyes! Look on the fields! They're white already to harvest!*

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God is calling us to the harvest. Sometimes at Victory Outreach we find ourselves actually out in real dirt rows with a hoe. Perhaps you heard about our congregation in Oxnard. It has set up a rehab home at a Santa Paula organic produce farm.

It had a rough start. Here we were, trying to obey God, trying reach all the little Taggers out there and their mothers and dads and uncles and brothers and sisters and aunts that other programs had failed. But, instead of being able to pursue our vision that God had given us, we ended up in court cited for health, building and safety code violations.

County officials ruled that the rehab, which housed 20 participants in a renovated barn, was not permitted in the legally established “open-space zone” where the ranch is located. Officials also rejected our argument that the center qualified as a religious retreat or seminary. Those uses were allowed by open-space zoning — and we thought it made us legal.

County officials threw the book at us. They said we had improperly disposed of waste water — which meant that a shower drain ran out onto the ground. They said we had inadequately marked exits, windows that were not up to current code, and no room heater.

But the county held off from prosecuting us. God opened their eyes to see how He had used us in treating drug addicts and alcoholics and gang members through our program of hard work, prayer, fasting, Bible study and Christian fellowship.

Under the terms of our agreement with the county, the rehab must engage in farming. Well, part of our vi-

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sion from the beginning was to farm the property, and it just came about sooner than we anticipated. Even in the darkest moments, we knew that the ranch was the place for our rehab home.

Today, we are farming organic produce in Santa Paula. The Lord has allowed us to win accolades from local politicians, police officers and even former President George Bush.

And the Lord sent us a Ventura businessman as well as a Camarillo farmer — just when we needed them to help achieve a vision of merging drug rehabilitation and organic farming on our 34-acre ranch.

Drug addiction is a selfish habit, and rehab residents begin to lose that trait when they get to the ranch. They become responsible. They begin to worry about how many weeds are out there and how come this end of the field isn't growing like the other end. Their minds get healthy.

The Ventura businessman I mentioned sold us the ranch for \$500,000, then agreed to carry the mortgage when we couldn't get bank financing. He is a recovering alcoholic himself and says he has seen a lot of miracles happen within Victory Outreach. He has pledged to help us any way he can.

That same conviction motivated a local farmer to donate fruit and vegetable seeds, used equipment and hours of his time. Without him, the farm might still be a dream.

By selling our produce, the farm now clears up to \$2,000 a month. Plus, the crops help to cut down on the rehab's supermarket bills.

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We have one guy who believed he would die a drug addict. He counted 12 times that he overdosed and woke up in emergency rooms. Then one day he was 47 years old and realized he had nothing.

He came to Jesus.

Now, drawing on his own experience with drug addiction, prison time and street life, this guy can reach young men, like little Tagger, who come to Victory Outreach.

Some wander in on their own, after hearing of the ministry through friends. Others are under court order to work through the rehabilitation program, which runs for nine months to a year, depending on individual progress.

Some are very young.

Some are almost elderly.

Still, they find Jesus there in the fields.

We hear testimonies of recovering alcoholics who after a few hours of sweaty fieldwork — dragging a rake across a newly plowed furrow — begin to experience a new clarity of thought. Hands scarred from years on the streets, learn to root out weeds and wield hoes. Men who have spent decades strung out on drugs learn to nurture zucchini, squash, watermelons, romaine lettuce and green onions.

As part of our agreement with the county, the 27 men now going through the program live at Oxnard's Crystal Lodge hotel, sold to us by the same great guy who financed the ranch.

We also have a group home in Santa Paula for seven women recovering from drug addiction. The women help out by selling the produce at farmers' markets.

Our ex-gang members, former drug dealers, methamphetamine chemists, drunks and wife abusers have a chance to think about life, Jesus Christ's love, all the bad choices they have made, and all of the wrong decisions that have brought them to this row of cilantro or parsley.

When they come to the ranch, they may not even believe in Jesus. They come in and go along with the program because a warm bed and a square meal are better than the street, better than jail, better than wherever they just got kicked out of.

So, they go along with our way of doing things, putting up with our rules because they have to if they are going to stay.

Some, like Tagger, do not. He broke out a window and ran. But if they stick with the program, they invariably receive a revelation of Jesus Christ. They have a personal encounter with Him, just like the Woman at the Well. Like her, a transformation takes place within their lives.

They catch the vision. Their lives are totally transformed. Many become preachers and pastors and missionaries.

That's what happened to the Woman at the Well. Everything in her life changed. She went from being a shamed street woman to a proud proclaimer of the Gospel.

I wish I could tell you that's what happened with Tagger. But his story is not finished. In years to come, I hope to tell you a happy ending.

I do want to finish telling you how Jesus' disciples returned from town — where they had gone apparently

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in search of a marketplace to buy themselves and the Lord some meat to eat.

There, as they looked at the Woman at the Well, they did not see in her the newly anointed missionary to Samaria.

What they saw was Jesus, their Master, their respected Teacher, speaking to an outcast woman. I hate to tell you that our Lord's disciples were racists, but in their society 2,000 years ago, they had been taught as children that they were better than Samaritans, who centuries before had intermarried with enemy occupying soldiers and local tribal pagans.

Samaritans were half-breeds in the disciples' biased opinion. Furthermore, men those days did not bother discussing important matters with women.

Now at this rural well in Samaria, the disciples could not imagine why Jesus was wasting His time talking with a half-breed woman. They were *amazed*, the Bible says.

They could not fathom why He would lower Himself so as to speak to a woman unfit to enter the city of Jerusalem or worship in the Holy Temple.

Yet, here Jesus was doing it.

The disciples wondered why He risked hindering His ministry and hurting His reputation by speaking to somebody like her. Why would He risk even being seen with her?

As the disciples gawked and offered Him some of the meat they had bought up in town, He told them He wasn't even hungry any longer.

What? Had He eaten? *Surely he hadn't accepted lunch from this unclean female Samaritan!*

“I’m not full of that food that you’re talking about,” He said. “But I’m full, My meat is to do the will of the Father that sent Me, and to be able to finish His work.”

He began to challenge them — to open their eyes beyond their prejudices and the biases of their upbringing. He began to urge them to catch His vision.

He wanted them to see things as He saw them. He said to them, “Listen, say not ye there are yet four months and then cometh the harvest.” Instead, “Look, lift up your eyes.”

What did He mean?

He was saying that the world is like a wheat field. The wheat stalks were as tall as they were going to get. Their tops were ripe and full and had changed color from green to whitish brown, indicating that the wheat was ready to make into flour. They were white. They were ready for harvest. *It was time to bring in the crop.*

Jesus was challenging His disciples to catch His vision for Tagger and all Samaritan women everywhere. You see, there are people out there who need salvation. The fields are white already to harvest.

Today, nothing has changed. The Bible says that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” That same Jesus who challenged His disciples, that same Jesus who challenged them to catch His vision was talking to you and me, too.

He was telling us to look at the vast needs all around us, all the hurting people in a land that has forgotten the God of our fathers. Jesus was challenging His disciples to listen to the cry of a society that no longer depended on the Lord as it once had — and to open up their eyes

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and see the enormous, fulfilling job ahead of them.

This same Jesus is challenging us today. This very same Jesus is telling us, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest."

What is He asking you to do?

If there was ever a time that Christians have been challenged in the inner city, it is today — this day and hour that we're living. In fact, you will find that the Holy Spirit seems to be targeting the inner cities.

This is the vision that I hope you will catch.

You are not reading this book by chance.

You're not here because you're lucky.

You're reading these words, I believe, because God wants to do something special in your life. He wants to totally revolutionize your life so that you will never again be the same.

I believe that as you read these pages, you are nearing a moment of destiny in your life. God has something for you. God wants to open up your eyes and reveal Himself to you.

He wants to give you a revelation and a vision.

Chapter 3

Where did we come from?

What is our mission?

Let me share with you the mission statement of Victory Outreach:

“Victory Outreach is an international church-oriented Christian ministry, called to the task of evangelizing and discipling the hurting people of the world with the message, hope, and plan of Jesus Christ. This call involves a commitment to plant and develop churches, rehabilitation homes, and training centers in strategic cities of the world. Victory Outreach inspires and instills within people the desire to fulfill their potential in life with the sense of dignity, belonging and destiny. Victory

Outreach works cooperatively with others of mutual purpose in accomplishing the task before us.”

Now, this statement looks simple, but do you know how long it took us to put it together?

Our elders and pastors took days to put this together. We locked ourselves in a room and spent days praying, laboring and brainstorming together to formulate our mission statement.

We started by asking, “What are we?”

Then we asked “Who are we?” and “What does God want for us?” From there it went on to “What has God called us to?”, “What is our vision?” and “What is the purpose that God has for our ministry?”

Then we started laying it out on paper and we came up with this statement.

But God has called us to be more than an organization. He has called us to be in relationships with each other; He has called us to be a family!

This is why we use family terminology. Spiritual father, spiritual son, spiritual grandfather. Right now we’re at the fourth generation. That’s right! There are churches in Victory Outreach who are fourth generation churches.

In case you didn’t know, I’m originally from Teen Challenge in Brooklyn, New York — back in the 1950s, the days of *The Cross and the Switchblade* and *Run, Baby Run*.

I was won to the Lord at Teen Challenge, an outreach to street kids and gangs in New York City with David Wilkerson and Nicky Cruz.

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I came to Los Angeles and started a ministry, but began to see that guys were getting saved but could not fit into the traditional churches. Many of them would actually backslide, because they'd try to go to a church, but they just couldn't fit. Some churches were just too sophisticated or socially conscious or unaccepting of newcomers.

Some were able to fit. But a great many others could not. Some became what you might call spiritual vagabonds. They would go visiting from church to church, not belonging anywhere, and not belonging to anybody or anyone. It was sad.

And that's when God began to speak to me, and say, "Something has to be done. You're effectively evangelizing people, but after they get saved, you just desert them and leave them on their own like spiritual orphans."

I saw guys falling, families being divided, people not being able to find a church, and people not feeling a sense of belonging. Even I didn't feel a sense of belonging.

I felt out of place.

I was reminded very clearly of when I got converted. I went to my mother's church and when they saw the son of Sister Arguinzoni, her drug addict son, all the women got hold of their pocketbooks and moved their daughters away from me.

That offended me. I wasn't a thief or a drug addict anymore! Jesus Christ had changed my life!

So, I knew what these new converts were experiencing.

So what did God do? God showed me that we needed

to raise up a church where people would have an opportunity to become men and women of God with dignity and a sense of belonging and a feeling of family.

I have a strong conviction that one of the reasons we're around is not only because God wants us to evangelize the world, but because He knew what we needed.

People need a church where the pastors come from their same background. People need a congregation where they don't have to be so sophisticated, but instead can come in and feel at home. People need a church where they could just be themselves and worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth — and feel comfortable and let their hair down!

People also need a church where they could form lasting relationships with people from common backgrounds. Many of us came out of the drug subculture or gangs. We talked the same language. Our harsh backgrounds startled other Christians and made them clutch their purses and hold onto their small children.

However, none of us were shocked by each other.

We were from the streets. We had been there — hurting, lonely and hopeless, too. We knew what it had been like.

People want a home base where they can feel a sense of belonging. They are looking for loyalty. Many kids today join gangs because they want to belong. They think the gang will be loyal — like a big family. “I am homesick for the home I've never had,” screamed the lead singer for the secular rock group, Soul Asylum, on their song “Homesick?”

So many kids today have never enjoyed being a part

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of a family. People need to see the Gospel lived out — and believers being faithful in relationships.

Rather than coming to the Lord after a single session of one-on-one witnessing, conversion is more and more of an ongoing process where skeptical people gradually form relationships as they listen, then watch to see if you and I live our faith — and whether we remain loyal, even under stress.

You know, the gangs pervert the concept of loyalty. They twist it into revenge and death. Well, the Lord can redeem loyalty and make it pure again. I believe we have to give people what they long for in the gangs. I mean, in the gangs you're dedicated, you're willing to die for your barrio.

The Lord has given us a vision to harness that energy and that commitment for good instead of evil. Gang members on the street are willing to die for one another. When we get those kids saved, the Lord turns all that energy around toward world evangelism, and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's why I say we are a natural for what God wants to do within the inner city. God has called us to a life of commitment and a life of loyalty — loyalty to your leaders, loyalty to each other, loyalty to your church. Maybe that is why we talk about loyalty so much.

We also talk about dignity. That is so important. You know, people are killed every day on the street because somebody did something to "dis" them — to show them disrespect and rob them of their self-worth and their dignity.

So, we are also conscious of dignity. When you at-

tend one of our services, you will notice that most of the men wear suits. Even the kids wear good clothes — and many of the boys have ties.

Why? Because it shows respect — both for the Lord and for one another. We are not second-class. We try to do our very best for the glory of God.

You know why? Because when God's people look good, it gives the glory to God. How many people out there expect a church like ours to really be nice? We don't have cathedrals, but our church buildings are all nicely painted — with graffiti constantly removed and broken windows quickly replaced.

When we put up posters, they look attractive and professionally done. It doesn't take that much extra effort. When guest speakers come to preach in our pulpit, some of them figure we're going to put them in a run-down, fleabag motel somewhere — you know, the cheapest firetrap motel in the worst part of town. So what do we do? We put them in nice hotels with air conditioning and swimming pools.

Now we are a people of quality. Maybe before we were all messed up, but ever since Jesus changed our lives, He rearranged everything inside of us, and now we're a people of faith. Whatever we do for God, we do it to the best of our ability!

When you go to our conferences and outreaches, look at the quality of what our people work to provide. Take a look at the stage, and take a look at the flags, and take a look at the literature, and take notice how everything that is done is done with quality.

Do you know why? Because we're glorifying the

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Name of Jesus Christ. Everything that we do, we do to the very best of our ability.

It's not so that we can be proud or better than somebody else, but so we can give God the glory.

I know it astonishes some people. They look around and ask, "Could anything good come out of these former druggies and drunks and gangsters?" Then they look at the quality of carpet on the floor and our choir singing like heavenly angels and they say, "Look at what the Lord has done with these street people." When Jesus changes lives, He makes all the difference.

Without a lot of prayer and loving discipleship, there could be some really crazy stuff coming out of a street outreach like ours. But I am convinced that we must maintain a balanced doctrine.

For example, I'm a faith preacher, but I'm not going to go overboard. I do not preach the "Greed Gospel" or that God is obligated to give you your every whim if you pray the right formula.

We also teach discipleship. But you've got to be careful about discipleship, too, or else it turns into bondage. Sometimes, we want to tell people what to do, even run their lives. But, God has not called us to take the place of Jesus Christ.

You've got to be careful with inner healing, too — and kingdom theology and many other teachings that prompt debate among Christians today. We've always said, "We are going to be a people of balance — doctrinally balanced."

Perhaps you have heard of the late Walter Martin and the ministry that he established, the Christian Re-

search Institute. They look at different movements and put out books on cults — warning Christians what to avoid and why. They have been pretty rough on some respected people. Somebody wrote to them about us. They wanted to know whether Victory Outreach was OK.

Somebody brought to me what they wrote about us. Do you know what they said? They called us a powerful ministry, a last day ministry that God has raised up. And they said that doctrinally we're sound.

I didn't even think they knew we existed.

But somehow they'd been monitoring us and checking to see what all our ex-junkies and former pushers and ex-prostitutes were preaching and believing. Doctrinally, they said, we're balanced. Doctrinally, Victory Outreach is sound.

And you know what I said? "Praise the Lord."

That balance didn't just happen.

Just imagine how a bunch of ex-dope fiends and ex-gang members could run around crazy — inventing their own religion as they went. But we have sought the Holy Spirit's guidance. We have dedicated ourselves to Bible study and sound teaching.

I've had to rebuke some of our younger guys who have gotten all enthusiastic about stuff that simply is not of God. We've had to ask some people to call themselves something other than Victory Outreach because they went away off the deep end on some teaching that just was not Bible-based.

For example, one of our younger converts decided he wanted to get into the healing ministry — but God had not called him to it nor anointed him with any gift of

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healing, such as the Bible talks about in the Book of Acts. But our enthusiastic guy saw faith healers on TV and watched what they do. So, in a Victory Outreach service, he got a man with a splitting headache to come up to the microphone.

Just like the faith healers our guy had watched, he asked the man with the headache a lot of questions. Then our guy raised his hands and, *Pow*, hit the man from the congregation on the head. Well, the guy with the headache was ready to fight! He got angry. "Man," he yelled, "I came in here sick and now I'm even worse. You gave me a bruise *besides* a headache."

Our guy meant well, but he had to be confronted. He had to see that this was not God's way.

I remember another guy who we sent out as an evangelist. For some reason, he turned angry and started attacking people and ministries in his sermons. We also had to talk to him. We had to tell him to get on his knees. If he was going to attack people in the pulpit, then he was going to have to call his ministry something other than Victory Outreach.

Mostly, we wanted him to get back on the right track. We didn't want to kick him out of fellowship. We only do that very, very rarely. We are committed to our people. And the loyalty goes both ways. When we speak to somebody about their unbalanced teaching, they usually respect us and seek the Lord about it — and change what they are doing.

Why? Because every church in our fellowship that has strayed from balance and the values the Lord has given us has experienced devastating effects. Gently, we

have to steer them back to the vision.

It all comes down to vision. We have been given a unity of vision. We have been divinely called to reach the inner cities of the world. We are not here to set up kingdoms or personal cults or superstar ministries. None of our guys are world-famous.

Our ministry is unique. I was not called to be a household name; nor are any of the thousands of preachers and teachers that Victory Outreach has raised up.

I believe the day of the superstar is fading fast. Instead, the Lord is using guys like you and me and a young street kid we will just call Daniel.

He and his best friend, Leo, had been hanging around with the gang, smoking marijuana and PCP since they were 10 years old. They started taking cocaine and heroin since they were 16. Both had spent most of their lives in Juvenile Hall and County Jail.

Today Daniel's arm still aches from a gunshot wound and his lip has a deep scar from a gang fight in which he saved Leo's life. But when they were 17, Leo was gunned down in a drive-by — shot 16 times in a case of mistaken identity. Daniel says Leo's death left him empty, angry and fearful for his own life. Leo had gone so quickly. Bang, bang and he was gone.

"I was addicted to PCP," remembers Daniel, "and I was pretty far gone, but I realized this wasn't the way to go. My homie's death brought so much pain to me and really made me think. I saw how precious life is and I decided to change. I used to get high every day."

Somebody from Victory Outreach witnessed to him at Leo's graveside service. It started Daniel thinking. Then

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the next day, "I was kicking back with the homeboys, and here this dude was again, talking to us about God. He said there was a way I could change my life."

Daniel bows his head. "I wanted it. I wanted to be free. I wanted to get strong."

He moved into the rehab home. There he had an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Today Daniel preaches to gang members — including members of the gang that killed Leo. He preaches to them that there is a rich, vital alternative to gang life. He goes boldly into gang hangouts and jails, offering to anyone who will listen the truth of Jesus Christ.

One evening recently, Daniel and a dozen other young men and women gathered in front of our church. With Bibles under their arms, they prayed and then piled into a truck, heading for a gang neighborhood in Compton, not far from the site of the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

They formed groups of three or four and began walking through the neighborhood, distributing bright red flyers and encouraging everyone to come to church. Daniel offered transportation to anyone who needed it.

Daniel soon began talking to three boys about 13 years old. He could tell by their baggy clothes and their hand signals that they were gang members.

"My homie was killed right here on this corner, and I can't bring him back to life," he told the group. "That's what's gonna happen to you, man. See where my teeth are broken? I had a shotgun in my mouth, and the only reason they didn't kill me is they ran outta shells. You don't have to die like that. But show me who you hang

around with and I'll show you who you are. Hang out with gang members and you'll be part of that life."

The small group grew to six or seven, with a few older boys stopping to listen. They seemed interested and agreed to meet Daniel the next night.

The boys said they would like to get out of gangs, but said it would be hard.

"It's too much trouble," said one 17-year-old whose eyes were bloodshot. "Your friends want you to stay, and besides you're more popular if you're in a gang. And even if you get out, you still have to come back home, go to school, go to the store. To get out, you have to move. I got no relatives I can move to."

But Daniel said the boy could get out if he wanted to. After all, "I did," he added.

The 17-year-old thought about that. "Yesterday, my friend was stabbed five times," he volunteered. "My friend's brother was shot in the back. The gangs threaten you a lot."

Daniel knows. Gang members "all start out nice, but they get corrupted. You end up with peer pressure making you do stuff you don't want. I saw one of the guys who shot my brother in jail. He said he was sorry. I know how it is."

Daniel said he realizes that many of the youths have nowhere else to go aside from their gang hangouts. "My main goal is to reach out, to show them there's a better way besides drugs and gangs. They don't find attention and love at home, so they find it in gangs.

"I'd rather they find it at Victory Outreach."

So would I.

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Yes, the Lord can raise up ex-gang members and dope addicts. Although you might see a broken bottle of a kid, the Lord can make that tattooed, scarred and scared boy or girl into a holy vessel to be used in His honor.

A better life is available. So is the love of a big family where he or she can belong. So is the warm, exciting realization that *this* is what it's all about — each of us accepting God's incredible gift of a new life and taking our rightful place in His family, allowing Him to use us.

Chapter 4

A ministry of dignity and purpose

I believe that God's people should have dignity. However, we have to be so careful. Dignity can become selfish pride.

People become so proud of who they are — and so caught up in their own self-importance. In churches, it gets really crazy sometimes. I have been in churches where there seemed to be competitive humility among the staff on the platform.

Everybody was acting so humble. Everybody was constantly making such a big show of their deep humility. They were all trying to outdo one another, proving to the congregation that they were more humble and more worthy than the other staff members.

They were so, so humble and yet so very proud of how effectively they demonstrated it.

That's crazy!

I don't care what your position is, whether you're the senior pastor of an immense church or the cook in a rehab home, be careful about pride!

Success leads quite naturally to pride. But the Bible warns us that pride goes before a fall and a haughty spirit goes before destruction! You can tell when people start getting proud. They begin to develop an independent attitude. They stop being family.

All of a sudden they get such a "corner on God" that nobody understands — and so they have to be the wise teacher, dispensing knowledge and insight.

They're even over the ones who led them to the Lord, on a broken sidewalk; those street preachers are now just too simple. The guy with pride suddenly has more revelation than those he has studied under and who have guided him into ministry.

Such a person is heading into problems.

I believe that our team members must be empowered to take initiative. They must be problem solvers. They have to be able to focus on challenges and depend on the Lord to guide them to solutions.

The last thing I want is for them to be calling me with every crisis. But we are here for one another. We need each other. I need you; you need me; we all need each other.

We're not to be the Lone Ranger — taking matters into our own hands, answering to nobody and declaring ourselves the ultimate authority of right and wrong. When we do that, we are no better than those people in the Book of Judges, who amid the chaos and darkness that fol-

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lowed Samson's death just made up their own Ten Commandments daily and did whatever was right in their own eyes.

There is strength in unity. That's why I watch for young ministers and evangelists and teachers who begin to isolate themselves.

Isolation is a sure sign that a person that is getting selfishly proud. If you are suffering from that, then you need to get back in fellowship with your brothers and sisters and those who first led you to the Lord and into the ministry.

You have to regain the vision.

Sometimes we have people who never catch the vision — or else show up with a different vision. You know, we really do not encourage people to transfer their membership to our churches from other congregations.

They probably need to stay in their church and let the Lord use them there.

Competitive Christianity has gotten out of hand these days. So many ministries devote all their energies to winning Christians away from other churches.

I know of a little town with three big church buildings — all of the same denomination. All three are basically empty. The first building was erected when a fireball of a preacher came in and gathered all sorts of believers from all around and got them united in a vision to build a beautiful church facility that would be a powerful testimony to the community.

So, they did. Then, they got into all sorts of squabbles over what kind of brick to use on the outside and what color of carpet to use inside. Soon, most of the deacons

had quit and the majority of the congregation was going to another little church across town.

They were not going to be outdone by their old church, so they did all sorts of advertising and promotion and got into a massive building program. Soon, they had most of the members from the other church and built a complex that took up most of a city block — and had so much space that the public school board began renting classrooms for the local elementary.

I don't know what caused the next fight, but it wasn't long before on the edge of town, a third building went up. It was gorgeous. But shortly, it was just as empty as the other two because all the members had gotten into a habit of migration.

Whenever anything went wrong or a new and exciting doctrine emerged, everybody pulled up their stakes and ran to the new church.

Well, I do not believe that sort of thing is of God. When church people show up at Victory Outreach all excited about what they have heard that we are doing better than other churches, we generally counsel them to go back to their home church.

Sometimes when transfers come into your church, they come in with a different philosophy of ministry. They may want you to change your philosophy of ministry to fit their ideas.

Well, we can't do that.

When a person comes in and tells me, "I'm a prophet of God, and God sent me to your church to show you His way," I have a simple response.

I say, "Well, prophet, sit down for awhile."

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Some of these people are incredibly pushy. “Oh Brother,” they say, “you don’t know what you have here, I mean, I’m a gift of God to your church.”

I just tell them to sit down and be quiet and find out what Victory Outreach is all about. Then, we’ll see how much of a gift of God they are to our church. Sometimes they do it.

But it is rare. Usually they move on — in search of a church that will let them be in the spotlight.

The few who stick around have to plug into our vision before they can be effective. If they’re going to come and if they want to help, then they have to understand the vision that God has given us.

Don’t get me wrong. Many people have committed themselves to the vision and calling of Victory Outreach after coming to us from other churches and other ministries. But they must come open to our vision, not with their own agenda.

The Lord sends us most of our leaders from within our midst. We learned long ago not to expect some expert to show up with all the solutions for our problems. If we need leaders, the first thing we do is ask God for them. James 4:2 says, “You have not because you ask not.”

Jesus will also give us the eyes to see those that He wants to raise up — those with potential. My natural eyes are not capable of seeing what God is able to do with people. I have to depend on Him.

At the first church I pastored, I looked out at the congregation wishing that we had leaders. I had started to instill vision by telling them God was going to raise up preachers, teachers and evangelists from our midst.

But yet all I could see was a sorry bunch of people. They had come from the streets. There wasn't a single businessman out there. There wasn't one banker. Nobody looked like a Sunday school superintendent.

I looked out at the crowd of messed up ex-dopers and recovering alcoholics and kids in torn T-shirts and I said, "God, what am I going to do with this crowd?"

A young man came up to me and said, "Pastor Sonny, I'm that man you're talking about. You have been preaching about how God is going to raise a preacher. I'm that preacher. Man, here I am."

I looked at him, and I thought to myself ... if God was going to raise someone up, this guy *definitely* was not it. I expected somebody who was sophisticated or educated or at least talented. I expected somebody with some personality. I envisioned the Lord sending me someone able to talk, at least — not this scrawny little street guy.

I had noticed him in the congregation. He was always looking around like he was scared. He was short and skinny and seemed to have a complex that somebody was going to sneak up and knife him from behind. He didn't look like any preacher I ever knew.

I didn't believe that God could use that young man.

That's a terrible indictment against me. I didn't believe that God could use that young man. I judged him. Not only did I judge him, but I was prejudiced against him.

I did not have the faith that anything good could come out of this guy.

So, I put him off. I told him, "Be cool man, just go

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back to your seat. Cool it man, don't worry about it."

"But Pastor Sonny," he persisted. "I'm that guy. I'm the preacher you're talking about. God has called me and I've got it. I've got it, I really got it."

"Yeah," I told him, "you got it all right. Just go back to your seat."

You know what that guy did? He went out into the streets and started preaching to people. He had caught it—the vision — despite my lack of confidence in him. He had heard from the Lord, even if I hadn't.

Do you know what happened? People started getting saved. He took them into his home. Before long, he filled his home. I didn't even know what was going on. Then he comes to me one day, and says, "Pastor, you've got to see what's happening. I told you that I'm the preacher you were talking about. You've got to see what's happening."

I was startled. I said, "What do you mean, 'See what's happening'?"

"I've got a whole lot of people that I've been proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to and preaching that God has given us a vision. I got hold of that vision and it is inside of me. I've gone into the streets with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and God has been saving people."

He took me to his house and I was flabbergasted. I looked at him and I couldn't believe it. He hadn't even been to Bible college. He didn't even know theology. He hadn't been licensed to preach or sent out by an ordination board. I said, "Well what have you been telling these people, man?"

"Well," he told me, "I've been listening to what you

say. I just go tell them the same thing. I've been getting results, and now we have a church here."

Then, he asked me, "Now what do I do with them?"

Well, the Lord touched my heart and showed me the mistake I had made. I told the guy, "You're going to be their pastor. And I don't care if you're not ordained by men. It looks like you've been ordained by God."

I laid hands upon him and sent him out in the Name of the Lord. That was the beginning of the launching of Victory Outreach churches. That is what we have been doing ever since — raising up leaders.

I was fortunate. Many pastors fail because they're not able to see the potential of the people God has placed around them.

My eyes were blinded to what was before me in the early days of Victory Outreach, because I was only looking at the surface. If you're involved in ministry, then it is very important for you to see beyond the surface and take notice of those that God has laid His hand upon — those who have potential for ministry.

The only way that we can minister effectively is if God will raise up men and women to do the work — leadership. We can have a vision, but if we don't raise up leadership, we will not be able to accomplish the vision.

If we're going to reach the world, then we need wisdom in selecting leadership. Success or failure will depend upon the quality of leadership that we establish.

Do not make the mistake that I almost made. Don't wait for the right one who is already polished or who has already been trained. If you do, you will bypass the ones that Jesus has selected — because you are put off by their

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raw character and style. They may look raw. Their style may seem a little bit rough. So we pass them by and don't take notice that God has laid His hand on their lives.

Many preachers fail because they do not take notice of people like you and me. The first thing that they look for is qualified people who have come out of a seminary or a Bible institute.

The Catholic church today is in crisis. Most of its priests are elderly. Few young men are willing to live the solitary life of celibacy that the Catholic doctrine demands of its clergy. I believe that a great many Catholics who feel the call to ministry are deterred since it is so incredibly difficult for the layman or laywoman to take any position of authority.

Here at Victory Outreach, the Holy Spirit has urged us to raise up workers and get them onto the battlefield — much as the United States rushed millions of young men into duty at the start of World War II. We cannot afford to bottleneck leadership.

In a matter of 96 hours — between December 7 and 10, 1941 — America found itself suddenly at war in Europe, Africa and Asia.

Millions of young American men and boys had to be trained as soldiers and rushed to the battlefields.

So it is today.

We need fighters in the trenches to oppose the onslaught of the enemy.

Yet, in many churches, they put ads in Christian magazines or newsletters for a music minister or a director of Christian education or a youth coordinator. The ad tells applicants to include their college transcript, their

résumé and a salary history. If many of us were to apply, we would probably have trouble just getting our high school transcript. It might be easier getting a copy of our police records.

There would be little point in typing up a résumé since it would start at age 10 with the drugs we took, the people we robbed, the gangs we warred against, and the jobs we were fired from.

And our salary history?

What salary? *Does welfare count?*

If some of us were to apply, we would have very little chance of getting an interview. We would not qualify for the job. When they looked at us, they would see drug addict converts and ex-gang members and former convicts. They would not be able to see beyond that — beyond the rough edges, beyond the raw exterior. They would not see a diamond in the rough.

I spoke on this subject the other day in a large church in Phoenix, Arizona. I shared about how God was raising up preachers and leaders. I told how most of our men and women come from the streets and extremely rough backgrounds. I told how, nevertheless, God has laid His hand upon them — and that when I see them, I see future leaders, future apostles, future pastors, future missionaries and future teachers.

That stunned some of those ministers.

But I could see that many were touched. Because of the rules of their denominations there may not be much that they can do about it, however, I could see they were now thinking.

In the early days of our ministry, I attempted to get

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some of our new preachers the denominational credentials that I felt they needed. Most of them did not qualify — at least according to our headquarters.

They hadn't come out of a Bible college; they hadn't finished high school; they had criminal records; they had violent histories; they had only been off hard drugs for a few months.

I was like a company man. I vowed that I was going to try to channel all of my guys into the denomination that had licensed and ordained me — and of which I am still affiliated.

I went to my denomination and said, "Listen, I've got some preachers man. Listen, I've got some powerful leaders that God is raising up."

"Well who are they?" the officials would ask.

"Well they were drug addicts, and they were gang members and they come from the streets, you know, but God has raised them up, and they have tremendous potential, and they have the anointing of God upon their lives."

At first the officials would ask me, "Well, did they graduate from Bible college yet?" Or, "Did they attend one of our Bible schools?"

The answer was "No."

Well, before they could license them or ordain them, they had to go to a Bible institute for three or four years. After they graduated, I would be able to license them, and my denomination could ordain them. They we could give them the papers that made them totally credentialed ministers of the Gospel.

We put some in school, but others said, "I don't want

to go to school. I'm ready to preach right now. I mean, I'm ready to go out right now."

Some that we sent to school lost their fire, their enthusiasm and their vision. They got discouraged. Even worse, some got so sophisticated that they were ineffective on the street. They tried to act like all the other preachers. They couldn't identify with the needs of our people anymore.

They lost their sense of mission and the vision that God had placed within their hearts. I could see that this was not working.

So, I went back to my leaders and I told them, "Listen, if you don't accept them, then somehow God is going to raise them up."

I told them, "You know, God has raised those preachers of ours up, even though our denomination has not. They don't qualify for credentials, but they surely qualify before God. He has ordained them. These guys are taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the streets, opening up churches, winning hundreds to the Lord, spreading the Gospel, and snatching lost lives out of the jaws of hell. And that's why Victory Outreach has been able to grow!"

See, God has raised up this movement and this ministry especially for those who are called into ministry so they will be able to fit in, feel at home, and be part of our church family.

Now we encourage our people to further their education through Bible college and independent study, but we emphasize that an education does not anoint you for ministry. While it is essential that we grow in our knowl-

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edge of the Word, we must remember that it is the Holy Spirit who equips us for ministry. If someone decides to further their education, they need to actively involve themselves in ministry: teaching, preaching or evangelizing. This will be a guard against losing their fire for ministry.

Chapter 5

What would Jesus do today?

While He lived here on earth, our Lord befriended crooked tax collectors, enjoyed the company of uneducated fishermen — and was widely criticized for associating with the rejects of society.

He publicly rebuked prominent religious leaders, yet forgave a woman caught in adultery — shaming the crowd which was about to stone her to death. He told them that only the sinless among them should throw the first stone.

I wonder if He were born in an American manger today instead of ancient Palestine ... *where would we find Him?*

Instead of healing the lepers, would He reach out to the addicted in the needle parks of our big cities? He always faced his critics, so whom would He debate? The

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi? Madalyn Murray O'Hair? Louis Farrakhan? If Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery, there's no reason to believe he would turn His back on Madonna or Liz Taylor today, would he?

What would He say to Rush Limbaugh, Pete Wilson or Ronald Reagan? How about Joycelyn Elders, Dr. Jack Kevorkian, Dan Rather or Geraldo Rivera?

How long would He speak to the multitudes? Would today's youth — with their short TV-culture attention spans — stick around to hear the entire Sermon on the Mount? Preachers used to speak for 45 minutes. Today, few dare to top 25 minutes. The younger the audience, the more likely the sermon will get shorter.

Raised in a world of instant gratification, few rules, sexually-oriented music, the AIDS virus, and moral ambiguity, today's generation dislikes being preached at, ignores authority, does whatever it pleases — and attempts to shock Baby Boomer parents who are not all that easy to shock.

In the age group called "Generation X" and the "Baby Busters," 38 million young men and women born between 1963 and 1977, are a generation "that doesn't speak the same language, doesn't go to the same places, doesn't have the same needs, and isn't looking to Christianity to answer their spiritual concerns," says Christian researcher George Barna.

How would Jesus reach them? They are the children of two-job families, raised in households where parents often were not around. Many are the children of divorce — with 50 percent coming from broken homes. The pain of failed marriages has made this a generation extremely

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wary of commitment. The median age for marrying has gone from 21 to 26 in the past four decades and continues to climb.

In their book *13th Gen* (for the thirteenth generation to grow up under the U.S. flag), Neil Howe and Bill Strauss predict that given their dysfunctional family background, this generation will be incarcerated and executed at a higher rate than any previous generation in U.S. history.

According to Howe and Strauss, every day 13 youth commit suicide, 16 are murdered, 1,000 become mothers, 100,000 bring guns to school, 2,200 drop out of school, 500 begin using drugs, 1,000 begin drinking alcohol, 3,500 are assaulted, 630 are robbed, and 80 are raped.

These sobering realities have produced a generation pessimistic about its own chances. Barna says these Baby Busters are “the most ignored, misunderstood, and disheartened generation our country has seen in a long time.”

This poses challenges for the church that we simply cannot ignore. Our faith cannot be a series of mere doctrinal statements. It must include a personal encounter — our personal encounter — with God. We have to admit that we *need* God — that we are weak and sick and cannot make it alone.

I believe that Jesus is exactly the role model that Generation X needs. He taught the importance of relationships. He was a caring teacher who had no career path and no place He could call home. His greatest battles were against the dogmas and hypocrisies of His day, and He placed little faith in religious institutions or man-made

rules and regulations. His message was of an almighty and powerful Creator and Father, capable of terrible anger, but full of grace. Jesus spoke out against racial bias and social injustice and He had little patience with hypocrites who falsely claimed to be holy.

I believe Jesus would have fit in just fine with today's music video generation. He does speak — and very effectively — to them today, even if the institutionalized church fleeing to the suburbs does not.

He loved people. After helping the outcast Woman at the Well, according to Matthew 9:36, He encountered a large crowd of people who were looking for Him.

“But when He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion on them because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He to His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.”

And then He told them,

“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into the harvest.”

His heart is for inner-city people. Whenever you find Jesus in the Bible, you find Him ministering to the down and outers. He even declared that He came to preach to the poor, and to bind up the brokenhearted, and those that are bound, and those that are captive.

So if Jesus was bodily here today, He would be a

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preacher able to identify with Victory Outreach.

Jesus always went out to minister to those who were lost, bound, and hurting. And remember, after his encounter with the Samaritan woman, He challenged the disciples to do the same. Here was an outcast woman who had been lost and bound in sin. All of a sudden she was free and saved.

Then He turned around to His disciples and told them to lift up their eyes and take notice of the need around them. “Look at the fields,” He said, “for they’re white already to harvest.”

In Matthew we find Him moved with compassion for the multitude. He challenged the disciples again, telling them, “The harvest is great and the laborers are few, pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into the harvest field.”

This is the same challenge that He’s given the church today. As we look around us, the need is great.

My temptation is to focus on East Los Angeles or maybe just southern California or maybe just the United States. However, we’re getting invitations from all over the world. In fact, from Russia we received an invitation which said, “The door is open right now, and we need you to come. We need you to come now, before the doors are closed. Now is the time that we need you to come.”

We are opening up homes for street children today in the metropolises of Brazil — where millions of kids have been abandoned and are being victimized daily. The need of the homeless children seems overwhelming. For example, let me tell you about little Fabiana.

At the young age of 11, she was kicked out of her

home because her family could not afford to feed her. She became one of the thousands of homeless street children in Brazil. Fabiana was sexually abused by strange men for mere pennies each day to feed her new family ... a group of young children who had flocked to her, dependent upon her for food.

Fabiana could not turn her back on their outstretched hands and cries of hunger.

Desperate to escape her life on the streets, Fabiana came into one of our newly established Brazilian homes for street children. There she received warm food and shelter and perhaps even more precious ... a sincere feeling of peace. She learned about Jesus Christ and saw that for the first time, there was hope for her life.

One evening a piercing cry shattered the quiet of the children's home. A group of children had come to take Fabiana back. With tears flowing down her cheeks she slowly walked out of the home and back into the living hell of life on the streets.

Why? *Why?* She was compelled by her love for the other children. Three days later she returned with her little group of street friends — whom she had convinced we could give help and safe refuge. Today Fabiana and her friends are enjoying the warmth and security of our home. And Jesus is working in Brazil through the lives of these incredible kids.

I'll tell you, I made a mistake when I took a children's class on evangelism in Bible school. They had a class on how to teach Vacation Bible School. I sat down in that class, and they started telling how to reach the little children, and how to teach them. We all had to sing, "The B,

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I, B, L, E! Yes *that's* the Book for me ..."

The teacher was all excited about how to sing songs with little kids and how to effectively evangelize children.

But I was not.

I had just come from the streets of New York. I had been at Teen Challenge, witnessing to murderous gangs in Brooklyn. And now, here I was learning the finger motions for "This Little Light of Mine". I decided it was pure nonsense.

I didn't need this stuff.

I figured I would never be ministering to children anyhow. I got up and walked toward the door and the teacher said to me, "If you walk out that door right now, you'll fail this class."

I turned around to her and shrugged.

Then I walked out.

And I failed the class.

But I didn't care. I said, "I don't need that."

I was far more interested in "heavy ministry". I did well in my other classes. They really interested me. I could see the purpose in them.

But not the kiddie class.

But do you know what I found out? After I began to pastor, I discovered that one of the most important areas in growing a church is ministering to children.

Nicholai V. Lenin, the godless Marxist dictator who led Russia into 70 terrible years of Communism once said, "Give me a child for his first five years and he'll be a Communist for the rest of his life." Today you can see the truth in his statement when you look at the problems

Russia is having adapting to a non-socialist system. Nobody knows what they believe. Many are falling back on what they were taught as kids.

Experience has shown us that kids who have a solid Christian foundation laid during their early years, are able to avoid so many years of troubles and tribulations. Did you know that a survey of preachers discovered that most of them made their decision to enter the ministry before age 11?

Children's ministry is not baby-sitting. It is kingdom building. I have never known a strong, effective church that did not have a strong, effective ministry for children. They are the next generation of leadership.

Do you realize that Christianity has always been one generation away from extinction? That's right. If we do not teach our kids in the way of the Lord, they will not automatically become Christians when they get married and have kids of their own. No, their kids may not have a clue about Jesus.

So, we have a sacred responsibility.

Anytime you hear somebody say that children at church are a bother, tell them to read Matthew 18:1-6. In that scripture, the disciples asked Jesus who was the "greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

He called a little child over and set the youngster in the middle of their group. The Lord's answer fills the next five verses. One of the key things He told them was, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Let me warn you: If the children of your church are not being ministered unto, it will affect your entire con-

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gregation, it will affect your attendance, it will affect the growth of your church.

I have learned to give a strong emphasis to Sunday school and during the preaching, a separate Children's church. The Children's ministry is an important specialty. You need to pray that the Lord will send you people who have a heart for kids.

I want first class for our kids. When it's not first class, all the way down to a top-notch nursery, then all the way up through Sunday school and youth ministry for the teens, then you will have unhappy parents. If you have unhappy parents, then you'll have an unhappy church.

Let me tell you another reason for an effective children's ministry. Parents who are disinterested in church are often willing to let their children go to Sunday school — giving Mom and Dad a quiet Sunday morning to themselves.

Those parents may view it as free baby-sitting, but it is an evangelistic opportunity. Here is a chance to pour your life into an eager child — many of whom have no positive adult role models in their lives. You may be the first man or woman who ever took a personal interest in them. If you win a child to the Lord and inspire him or her to evangelize their neighborhood, you may be amazed at who shows up. A particularly enthusiastic kid may recruit an entire busload of kids from his block. You had better be ready to minister to them.

And it is not at all uncommon for Mom and Dad to start showing up at church with their newly saved kids. The children are behaving completely different and the parents want to know why. Second, the kids are prob-

ably witnessing 24-hours a day to Mom and Dad — worrying constantly that their parents are headed straight to hell. So the parents show up just so there can be peace in the house

I can think of two brothers whose mother was a prostitute. She weighed about 400 pounds and was a strange person. If the school principal or a church worker would call and make an appointment to come over, she would change into a see-through negligee. She would answer the door in her baby-doll nightie and delight in the visitor's discomfort.

Her boys, who were age 6 and 8, had no socks. They owned no underwear. They were given to raging fits of anger. But they would latch onto any adult who would pay them the slightest attention.

“Well, Robert has found him another papa,” I would hear his Sunday school teacher say. Sure enough, little Robert would be standing on the sidewalk, holding the hand of one of the deacons of the church or any teenager or any total stranger for that matter.

Neither brother was even slightly shy. Both would sit in church with you and tell you everything they knew on any subject — while you tried to shush them and get them to wait until the service was over.

It was nothing for them to make incredible announcements, such as during an anti-drug lesson, “My mom sells drugs.”

During prayer requests, they might speak up: “My new daddy stabbed my step-uncle in the chest last night and they both had to go off in the ambulance. Now they are in jail and my Mama, too.”

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They had to be taught a different way to deal with girls their own age. Robert would latch onto a girl in Sunday school, declaring that she was his girlfriend. Then, he would begin ordering her around. During the lesson, he would get up and stand behind her chair, then announce to the teacher that he had to talk to the girl “right now.”

Usually the girls were amused. Sometimes they became alarmed, particularly if Robert would insist that they stand in a certain place or wait in a certain chair until he came back from some errand he would invent — apparently to see if they would do what he said. Obviously, he was imitating the behavior of the men in his mother’s life — abusing, controlling and demanding.

As a children’s worker, you may find yourself teaching lessons not in the Sunday school teacher’s manual. Male workers may be the first significant man in the child’s life. In that role, they bear an awesome burden.

You may find that the kids love hearing and re-hearing your testimony and your life story — although the stories you tell may not be all that dramatic. Just the story of fishing with your grandfather when he let you reel in six catfish may have to be told week after week.

These kids are often hungry for clues on how to be men — even kids who are five and six years old. You are their role model. You are their hero.

I know of one Sunday school teacher whose all-boy class of 12-year-olds loved hearing about their teacher being in the delivery room to witness the birth of his only child. “I was proud to be there for my daughter’s birth,” he would tell the young men. The boys all asked questions about the experience.

“Didn’t you faint?” asked one.

“Why’d you *want* to be there?” queried another.

“I wanted to reassure and comfort my wife,” he would respond. “I wanted to be able to say to my daughter that from the moment she entered the world, I was there for her.”

Seriously, the boys would take that in.

Sometimes he would invite the boys to ask his wife and daughter questions, too. The kids would shower them with questions on going out with girls, whether they liked kissing and whether they liked going to church.

In such a situation, you will find that many kids have known only crisis and disorder in their lives at home. They’ve never had the opportunity to observe an adult male who is pursuing a career, and who loves and provides for his family.

Too often the boys only know about manhood in terms of violence, sexual promiscuity, and a life of substance abuse. They get it from personal observation as well as TV, movies and exploitative music.

Little things are important. You need to be reliable and predictable. You want the kids to know that they are important enough that you will always be there when you say you will be.

Don’t expect your ministry to begin and end at Sunday school, either. Field trips to the zoo may bring some incredible discoveries — such as that even 12-year-olds who have never been out of their neighborhood and have never seen a giraffe. The kids may expect the zoo to have dinosaurs — which can give you an interesting opportunity to explain the Creation story.

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If you play baseball or football or soccer, do not expect any of them to have any experience. You may be surprised that some are quite skilled. Others will have never participated in sports. You will need to help them, cheering whatever they do and insisting that they are phenomenal athletes — particularly if the other kids are making fun of their mistakes.

The bottom line is that if you are going to raise up a church, then you raise up these children. Look at them with the eyes of God and you will see see future pastors, evangelists and missionaries.

Chapter 6

You are going to need help

There are three kinds of people in the world. There are those who don't know what's happening, those who watch things happen, and those who make things happen. We need leaders in Victory Outreach who make things happen.

Leaders come from different backgrounds, different personalities and different styles. But to be successful, they must be able to make things happen.

They must be able to take initiative. They must be aggressive. They cannot be content with just holding a title. They must recognize their calling and the anointing upon their lives, and get out there and make things happen.

One of my frustrations is a leader with no vision. I feel like reverting to my pre-Christian style of handling

situations and just shaking them up. I feel like yelling at them “What’s wrong with you, brother? You’ve been here for 20 years, man! You still haven’t got anything happening. Brother, come on, take this city for Jesus!”

When I do talk with them, their attitude is “Well Pastor Sonny, I’m still praying about it, you know. And I’m still looking at the need, you know.”

Looking at the need? It’s time they stopped looking at the need! It’s time to get out there and do something about the need!”

I don’t understand people who, when they give their testimony, tell how they used to hustle out there when they were in the world. “I used to be out there, man, and I would go, and I would hustle, and I would get money, you know, and I would have to do this, and do that, and all this and that, you know.”

Then they get saved and, all of a sudden, they’re dead, paralyzed — like a dead log. You can’t even move them: *no initiative, no aggressiveness, no enthusiasm... no vision.*

“Man,” I say, “If you had energy when you were in the world, and you were aggressively going out and hustling for money to support your habit, then it is time to ask the Lord to help you harness that energy to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Furthermore, I would expect to see you doing it with greater commitment, greater enthusiasm, and greater dedication!”

Spreading the Gospel requires boldness.

Because of our boldness, we’re able to move into the worst neighborhoods of some of the world’s roughest cities with aggressiveness and dedication and effec-

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tiveness. If we lose that, we fail to do what God has called us to do.

We also need specialists. Now, this is an area that is very important for you to understand. We need leaders who are well-equipped in all the departments of the church. If you desire to be a pastor, perhaps you need to ask the Lord if pastoring a church is your calling.

I know a Christian worker who is effective in working with children. He can read them like a book. He can communicate with five-year-olds; he can inspire 10-year-olds. But it is a mistake to expect him to accomplish anything in street witnessing to teen gangs.

If he goes along on such an outing, you can expect to look around and eventually you will find him sitting in a doorway with four or five little kids. He's laughing with their mother and finding out if any of them have ever heard about Jesus. He's telling the kindergartners that if they come to Sunday school next week, the teacher there is a kind, wonderful grandma from Jamaica who knows how to make animals out of balloons.

If you tell him that he should be witnessing to gang members, he will look uncomfortable. He will give it a shot. But he will be a lot happier if you tell him to go on down to the park and invite the kids on the swings to Vacation Bible School.

I have had people look at me in concern. How can a man get along with little kids so well? It is a gift. He has four kids of his own. They all love the Lord. He has coached them in a variety of sports and led their Scout groups for years. One of his daughters is named after a kid he took in when he was in college — a boy who is

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now in his 30s, married and working as a salesman for a large industrial firm near Chicago.

This guy just likes kids. He was never in a gang and doesn't know what to say to a glassy-eyed 17-year-old with obscene tattoos on his neck and a marijuana joint in his hand.

But this guy is a specialist.

We need more like him.

Listen, he is no good with financial books. But in our ministry, we have people who are. And they are just as vital. Sometimes we think that inner city ministry is constant drama — leading vicious gang members to Jesus on the sidewalk, delivering heroin addicts from their habit in the Name of Jesus.

But it's more than that.

It's not just going into the streets. It's not just counseling in the rehab home. As we look toward the future, we must have well-rounded leaders able to set up Sunday schools and establish home Bible studies and keep good financial records so that at the end of the year, donors get accurate reports for their income tax returns.

You know, those end-of-the-year statements can have a big impact. A teen who has been sacrificing \$10 a week to tithe his earnings from flipping burgers at McDonalds gets a financial statement that tells him he gave \$520 that year toward the building of God's church. It gives him a sense of accomplishment.

He looks at the chairs and the carpets and the lights and has a very real feeling that he has invested here — that he helped bring this ministry forward.

We need administrators who know how to run an

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office. We need coordinators of volunteers — coordinators who are incredibly gifted at managing people — and making sure that everybody shows up to teach their Sunday school class.

So, if you desire to be a pastor, I challenge you to seek the Lord about your gifts and talents. Can you make a computer do amazing things? Then you are extremely valuable and should offer your talents to your church — maybe teaching the rest of us how to punch that keyboard and find what we lost on the hard drive.

Being a pastor is not the only calling. Following the Lord's leading to use the talents He has given you will give you fulfillment and joy.

As I look out at our congregation, I see preachers and missionaries and pastors and evangelists. I also see youth workers and rehab counselors and office administrators. I see God is raising them up right from the midst of our people.

But I want to share something else with you. Sometimes, particularly when a work is brand-new, there are no specialists, yet. You will have to trust the Lord to empower you with all sorts of gifts and talents — or else bring you multi-talented people who can help fill in the gaps.

As a pastor of a pioneering work, you may have to wear many hats. Sometimes when leaders come from a large church, they assume that every congregation has a rehab director and a youth minister and a songleader. Well, it may not happen like that. I don't even think you need a rehab director when you go out pioneering.

Your church needs a place of refuge for the street

people and you need to live right there with them at the rehab. If you don't, then you are going to be separated from a big part of your ministry. The guys at the rehab are going to be separated from you, too, missing the opportunity to look to you and have you share your vision. They are your first generation. You need to be involved in their lives.

Your first generation leaders are so important. When I went out, I didn't have anybody running my rehab house. I just invited homeless and hurting people home to sleep on my couch or my floor. My apartment was Victory Outreach's first rehab.

Where are you going to find your first generation of leaders? I see potential leaders in every church and rehab that I visit. I see people who are obviously talented. They may be very gifted, but how are they spiritually? Do they really, really love Jesus? Are they broken before the Lord? I look for that. It's really more important than speaking ability.

Do they like to pray? If I see that they don't like to talk to the Lord, if they never join in at prayer meetings, if they are always outside, or sitting in the back, then I doubt they are yet a candidate for leadership. A candidate for leadership visibly gives the testimony that he has a strong spiritual life and a strong relationship with Jesus Christ.

Then, there is personal integrity — doing the right thing when *nobody* is watching. Even a criminal does the right thing in front of people.

What do I look for when considering a person's integrity? Is he doing right within his home? How is his

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home life? Is he beating up his wife? I know some guys who want to be in ministry, but they cannot control their tempers — and they abuse their spouses.

The wife will come to church with bruises on her face. She will say, “Well, I fell down, you know. I fell down.”

But after it happens over and over, you know she’s covering for him. A leader cannot be one thing at home, and then another at church. As soon as they drive up to the church, do you hear them fighting out in the car? Then they come in and he says, “Oh darling, how about this seat right here? Oh, muffin. Yes, yes, sweetheart.”

That is not integrity.

Does the person we are considering for leadership tithe? You need to find out if they’re faithfully giving to God that which belongs to God.

Do they have a balanced life? We don’t want someone who is too heavy into one thing or the other — inner healing or discipleship or the book of Revelation. We need someone who is balanced, so that he will raise up a balanced congregation.

The prospective leader should have a desire for achievement. He should be a goal-oriented self-starter — a self-motivated person.

Yes, there is a place in the church for people who don’t move until you tell them to move. There are some people who wait for you to tell them, “Do this, and this, this and that.”

They say, “OK,” and they go do this, this, this, and that. Then, when you don’t tell them to do something else, they don’t do anything at all.

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When you ask, “Well, brother, how come you’re not moving, taking care of business?”

“Well, nobody told me,” they respond.

Such people can be reasonably good workers. However, they are not leaders.

A leader must be a motivator, too. He should inspire people to lend a hand to the task at hand. He should be so filled with enthusiasm that he makes other people want to be a part of what he’s doing.

Let me give you an example. Brother Julian Mendez, who is working in Brazil, told me, “Pastor Sonny, you’ve got to come and see Brazil. Pastor Sonny, you’ve just got to come. Oh, Pastor Sonny, there’s an explosion happening in Brazil. God has given us that whole country, man.”

I had a busy schedule, so I told him, “Well, I don’t know where I could fit you in, Julian. I have so many things on my calendar.”

So, he said, “Well, Pastor Sonny, I just want you to pray about it. I want you to pray because some powerful things are happening.”

And he went back to Brazil.

Then he called me on the phone, “Oh Pastor Sonny, Pastor Sonny, I want you to know that there’s an explosion here. The church is packed. I’m ready to go into two more cities and the rehabs here are filled.”

He got me excited. I said, “I’ve got to get the calendar. I’ve got to go to Brazil to see for myself.”

Sure enough, I went to Brazil, and in Sao Pablo, what did I see? I saw a motivated leader and congregation ready to take Brazil for Jesus.

He’s the type we need — aggressively motivated for

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Jesus Christ. A potential leader should be decisive, too. Sometimes a pastor has to make hard decisions. If something is not working, then he has to be bold enough to fix it or kill it. If a program has died a natural death, he has to be decisive enough to give it a good burial and move on with something new that does work.

He must be able to work with people. There are some perfectly good speakers and teachers who cannot work with people. So, they have no business being pastors. A leader has to love people and earn their love and trust. I see some guys who have abrasive personalities. They look angry all the time. They are difficult to deal with — people can't stand them and are offended by what they say.

I always pull them aside and say, "Listen you've got the anointing of God. He has called you, but I want you to go in the evangelistic field for a while."

Why? Because an evangelist can hit and run. He can come into a church, blast everybody for their apathy and their laziness and their sin. Then he can move on. He doesn't have to pick up the pieces or work with the stunned people or even be a team member. He just speaks the word of the Lord — like Isaiah or Jeremiah — and like my good friend Nicky Cruz.

Nicky pulls no punches. As a result, he is a great evangelist. But he just smiles at the idea that he might one day pastor a church. *He is where God wants him to be.* That is not to say that one day we might not turn around and see Nicky pastoring a congregation somewhere — and enjoying success. If that is what God has for him, God will prepare Nicky — or you or me in His divinely ordained time.

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God has a way of smoothing out our rough edges. I've seen it happen so many times. He has done it with me over and over. If God has called you, even though you're rough, even though you sometimes say the wrong things, and even if you offend people, He can still use you.

Listen, some of the pastors today with big churches in Victory Outreach were no angels just a few years ago. The change that has taken place in their lives is incredible. Had you seen them not so long ago, you might have asked, "Could anything good come out of this young man?"

I am talking about heroin addicts — like me.

I am talking about thieves and pushers and street fighters who enjoyed the flow of blood.

You might have looked at their faces, then at their rap sheets and you would have declared that nothing good could come out of their ruined, wasted lives — that they are totally unqualified for consideration as Christian leaders.

But, yet, here they are leading powerful churches.

But do you know what God does? He is in the change business. He knows what He intended for you and me.

He knows what hidden talents He placed in us and what purposes He had for us long before we were born.

Of course it does not stop there. The Lord puts those He can use through a lifelong molding process guided by His Holy Spirit. Listen, I am still being molded. So are you. My wife is constantly amazed at me. She says, "You're not the same man I married — praise God!"

Well, I don't always know how to take that! But the

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change that God brings about happens even without our recognizing it. God's hand is there in our lives, nudging us along. We must allow Him to do His work in us. And as we do, there's a process that takes place inside. Little by little, He is conforming you to His image. He's developing you and equipping you, so that you can effectively go out and do what He's called you to do.

But for it to happen, we have to maintain a teachable spirit. That's something else that I look for in a potential leader. A teachable spirit means humility — that you can take direction and, if necessary, even a stern rebuke.

That takes self-discipline — which is something else that I look for in a potential leader — self-discipline.

I also watch for his ability to make decisions. If you can't make decisions, then you're not a leader. Sometimes you have to make decisions that may not be popular. If God wants you to make it, then you have to make it. And you have to stand by your decision.

Then, there is something that's very important — persistence. If you don't have persistence, then you're not going to go very far in the ministry. Why do you need persistence? Because the devil is going to hit you with everything he has.

You need to be able to hold your ground. You need to be able to go forward even as the devil attacks you. A leader has to be able to advance through the storms because he's secure in his loving trust and dependence in Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an example of somebody with persistence. Brother Max Alva is one of our ministry leaders. He is dealing with a certain respiratory problem, yet

he preaches with an oxygen tank right by his side.

The first time I saw him get ready to go up into the pulpit with his oxygen, I didn't believe my eyes. People on oxygen are supposed to be in bed!

I asked him, "What are you doing, Max?"

"I'm going to be preaching," he said,

"With that oxygen tank?"

"Sure I am," he answered.

"How?"

"I just take a really deep breath of oxygen before I start. And I lay the tank over to the side on a chair and if I need another breath of oxygen, then I walk over with my microphone while I'm still talking and I get one."

I have seen lots of preachers who pause throughout their sermons to take a sip of water. The congregation soon doesn't even notice. I suppose it is the same with Max.

Then, he added, "Not only am I preaching, but then I pray for the sick too."

Hallelujah!

Can you imagine what the devil would be telling him? Satan has to be whispering in his ear: "Hey, Max, you can't pray for other people to be healed. Didn't you ever hear of physician-heal-thyself? Look at that oxygen tank over there. They should be praying for you, not you praying for them — and wearing yourself out like this."

Another example would be a brother out at the Victorville ranch who was in a serious auto accident. Does he lie in bed, feeling sorry for himself? No, he goes out ministering in a wheelchair. That is persistence. He could have had a pity party, but God has placed His hand upon

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his life and called him into the ministry. So, accident or no accident, this brother has said, “I am going to obey the call of God in my life.”

Now he’s a pastor, a minister of the Gospel, pastoring a church — in that wheelchair! It is not going to hold him down. Brother Max’s oxygen tank is not going to hold him down, either!

They are believing for their healing! They are standing firm on the Word of God. And they’re going forward and preaching the Gospel with persistence in the meantime!

Joey Rosales is another example. He had been a street fighter and a teen gangster. He had done a lot of things and seen a lot more, but he was never a complainer. He was what I call a die-hard.

Once I had Joey, the ex-gang kid working with Art Blajos, the former hit-man for the Mexican Mafia, you know, the big Mexican gang, El EME.

What a combination. The street kid and the convicted killer. One day I had called the two of them into my office. They had gotten into some sort of hassle and I had noticed that they were not speaking to one another.

Does that surprise you? Even people in ministry can behave like that? We are all still human. So, these two guys were upset with each other.

See if you can imagine this: Joey is sitting over here, and Art is sitting over there. So, I ask, “What’s wrong, guys?”

“What do you mean, ‘What’s wrong?’” asks Joey. “It’s just this dude over there. He’s just getting on my nerves. That’s all there is to it.”

Then Art says, "Joey, you're the one who's getting on my nerves. You're the one who —."

"No, man," interrupts Joey. "You're the one. In fact, if you are going to keep that up, I am thinking of killing you."

I almost laughed out loud. The scene may not sound comical, but it was. Here are two Christian brothers who are not about to kill anybody, yet in their former lives before they met Jesus, it would have a very real possibility.

I wasn't worried about any blood being spilled on my carpet. Nevertheless, here I had Joey sounding like he is back on the street, fearlessly mouthing off to someone who was one of the most feared contract killers in the whole United States.

So Art says, "You're going to kill me? Ha! You're going to kill me? Then, I'm going to kill you."

I had to intervene. Things were going downhill very quickly. "Wait, wait, wait a minute, guys," I said. "Hold on, guys. Nobody is going to kill anybody. If we're going to kill anybody, why don't we all get together and let's kill the devil."

They both looked at me and started to laugh.

Now this whole conversation would have shocked any traditional minister. Here I had these two men of God on my staff saying they wanted to kill each other.

If you knew Joey or have been around Art, you might take me aside and advise me, "Pastor Sonny, those two were not just verbalizing it. I mean, they really meant it. When they say killing, they really mean killing. Neither one of them is given to empty threats."

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Instead of getting fearful, I told them that they had to shake hands. "Let's hug each other right now," I told them, "and let's be unified right now. Let's get this thing together. Let's go forward in the Name of the Jesus to do the work that God has called us to do."

Guess what happened after that?

They both not only got together, but Joey went on to minister in the British Isles, and guess who went with him? Art Blajos. They both teamed up together to take Great Britain for Jesus Christ.

I tell you that story as one more example of how God is constantly changing us, working with us, smoothing out our rough edges.

This sort of exchange doesn't happen in just every ministry. But we are a unique bunch of people who God has raised up. We have to recognize that most of us come from violent backgrounds where our lives were totally messed up.

But listen, God's grace is sufficient.

Each of us is a testimony that God has been able to get hold of our lives, turn us upside down, then right side up, clean us up and polish us. Because of Him, we're able to go forth and accomplish His work.

Let me tell you another example of change. I see it in how the men of Victory Outreach are increasingly being molded by God into good fathers and husbands.

I see it every day — and I believe it is a big part of God's plan to save the inner city, helping reverse 200 years of destructive attack by the enemy. For two centuries now, each generation of fathers has passed on less and less to his sons — not necessarily less money, but

less attention, less wisdom and less love.

The problem has snuck up on us until today, in the inner city, we have a culture in which fathers are seemingly irrelevant. As a result, godless programs are devised to fill the gap and raise the kids.

Well, such well-intentioned projects are doomed to failure. Kids need dads and moms. But where are they to be found? From the beginning of time, dads worked at home as farmers or herdsmen or as craftsmen. Look at the example of young Jesus of Nazareth. His earthly stepfather, Joseph, was a carpenter, so Jesus learned the trade at His dad's side.

Sons worked alongside of the dads and did not have to go far to answer their private, insecure questions about what it took to become a man.

But the concept of fatherhood changed drastically during the Industrial Revolution. The invention of time-saving machinery and the concept of the assembly line spawned great factories, vast mines, and efficient processing plants. They all needed workers.

It became no longer degrading or shameful to be a "hireling" — working for somebody else. Furthermore, the standard of living improved in terms of material possessions.

Men went out from the home and farm and their small business to go to work for a boss. Often they would leave very early in the morning and not return until after nightfall — six and seven days a week. Some could make the journey back home only on weekends.

With the advent of the 40-hour work week, things improved — except that the fathers did not stay at home.

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They had forgotten why they should. They got second jobs so they could make more money.

As a result, masculinity ceased to be defined in terms of family involvement — that is, skills at fathering and husbanding. Instead, manhood began to be defined in terms of making money. Men stopped doing all the things they used to do in terms of nurturing their children.

Instead, fathers became Dad the Provider, bringing money home to the family, rather than Dad the Nurturer, living and working at home within the family.

It followed naturally that if all Dad's functions were economic, if his status was measured by how well he provided, then the father who earned more was a success. The father who earned less was a failure.

A father's success was no longer measured by how happy or healthy his kids were — or whether they did well or stayed out of trouble.

A father's position in the family was no longer determined by whether he was the spiritual leader of his household, whether he was emotionally sensitive to his wife's needs, or how well he functioned as a mentor to his sons and daughters and grandchildren, or if he devoted his time and energy to ensuring the physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual health of his family.

In the eyes of the world, a dad's life became a 50-year series of economic contests in which few won by becoming the richest. Most men lost since they provided less than the others.

Once fathers moved out of family life and became part of work crews, family values ceased to be their pri-

mary concern. They were not there to see that five-year-old Junior was yelling disrespectfully at Mom. They were not around to become concerned that their 14-year-old daughter was too infatuated with boys. They were not there to help their son deal with the neighborhood bully. They were not there to tell their daughters that they were wonderful and pretty and talented.

Increasingly, Dad certainly did not help with the schoolwork. In fact, our culture shifted all responsibility for kids' education to out-of-the-home schools, which initially were church-run, but were gradually taken over by the government. In the last 30 years, schools have become spiritual wastelands — devoid of values, morals or Christian guidance.

Dads also in the last 30 years, and mothers as well, have focused less and less on their kids. Who they were was defined by what they did at work — and how successful they were in their profession. A woman without a career was considered less a woman, stuck in the Dark Ages, failing to live up to her potential.

Mom and dad adopted the values of their fellow workers. Work even ceased to be something Mom and Dad did for the sake of their families. Instead, it became work for the sake of work.

Increasingly, working parents didn't slow down when they achieved a level of sufficient comfort — allowing them to spend time with their youngsters, who were being raised by day-care workers, schoolteachers and after-school baby-sitters.

Instead, the parents strove even harder to get the approval of their fellow workers and to earn glory in their

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eyes. They worked because their job titles told them who they were.

But Mom came under terrible stress because her abandoned children demanded more and more of her. Somebody had to cook and shop and dry their tears.

But Dad was off the hook. Two centuries had excused him from responsibility. He was no longer a dad.

He was just a donor whose children were his contribution to the continuation of the human race. He was a working man. Now our culture expected his family should understand that their claims on him came second or third — depending on how many jobs he had.

But that is not what God intended.

Today, we see a movement to restore the family by returning mothers to the home and re-establishing the dignity and status of the nurturing mom.

However, God is calling dad home, too.

He is putting in their aching hearts a new longing for their families. But after 200 years, it is not easy to come home. So many dads have no idea of what is rightly expected of them.

They are emotionally inept! Growing up, boys here in America are taught to ignore their feelings — and everyone else's. Trouble is, we men need feelings in a Christian family. We need them in order to be able to be spiritual leaders.

We need them in order to be pastors.

Dr. Ronald F. Levant at Harvard Medical School and Cambridge Hospital in Massachusetts says most men today are the victim of “trained incompetence” when it comes to the warmer spectrum of emotions.

However, we can be taught.

And the Holy Spirit is a great teacher. There's nothing unmanly about being sad or tender or warm. These are the feelings that give life depth and richness.

In today's inner city, I believe most boys and many grown men suffer from a gnawing ache that has been described as "father hunger."

Theirs is a frustrating search for the missing dad who never offered protection, provision, nurturing, modeling or approval. I believe that so many of these tough guys in the gangs who seem to want to scare the world into respecting them as men and who are filling up our jails — and all men who don't know how to be a real man. They fill up the divorce courts — and yet they secretly desire and yearn for the dad who never hugged them or went down to the park with them to play catch.

So, they go through their adolescent rituals day after day for a lifetime, waiting for a father to treat them good enough to be considered a man.

They call attention to their pain by getting into trouble, doing things that are bad for them, as if they are calling out for a dad to come take them in hand and straighten them out or at least tell them how a grown man should handle their pain.

Let me tell you something: A father today who gets to hang out with his children experiences a joy that can be found nowhere else.

A man who will let the Lord mold him into Dad the Nurturer rather than just Dad the Provider will feel and express his masculinity and Christian faith in ways that will revolutionize his life.

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Fathering is the most masculine thing a man can do. As I look at many of the young men of Victory Outreach coming into manhood, I see spiritual leaders who are willing to risk being hands-on fathers, in a way that was rare in my generation. My sons and sons-in-law have a yearning for their children that I believe the Holy Spirit has given them.

I feel so optimistic about the sort of fathering these guys will do. The trend is clear: the boys who get fathered want to be fathers, and the boys who don't, fear it.

But at Victory Outreach, we are raising up fathers!

Chapter 7

There goes a preacher

When I look at people, I see preachers.

I see preachers of the Gospel.

I see men who would be good preachers. I see some women who could do some heavy preaching also.

Just the other day, I was at a conference and I said to myself, "Oh boy, there goes a preacher. There goes another. And there's another one."

I see preachers in rehab homes. I see preachers in Sunday school. I may have even seen one or two in the baby nursery — we'll see.

One of the marks of our ministry is the raising up of preachers. Where do they learn to preach?

That's very important, because in our ministry, you just can't have preachers droning behind pulpits. Now there are some ministries where the preachers do that. They teach. And that's fine for those ministries. They're dealing with a certain group of people who respond to

charts and diagrams. With our type of people, it won't work.

We go into some of the most violent places in the world. We regularly plant churches in neighborhoods that the police are afraid to enter after dark — places plagued with crime, overrun with drug addiction, and dominated by gang activity.

So, where do our guys learn how to preach? They learn out in the street corners. We take them out, give them a microphone and say, "Start giving your testimony, man. You don't know the Word of God yet, but begin by giving those dudes over there your testimony for Jesus."

Then we stand back as the hecklers start yelling at them. The more noise the better. Then we say, "Come on now, just get in there and begin to tell about the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

And our guys get up there and they have to scream at the top of their lungs. But they begin to experience an anointing that God gives them during public speaking.

That's the beginning.

In this baptism by fire, you will learn a style of preaching that you will not learn in a seminary — unless things have changed recently.

We go sometimes after dark to a tough section of town where gunfire and drug dealers mix and the noise of rap music and ridiculing laughter and where the sweet smell of people getting high to the sound of old hip-hop records blends with the cries of hungry babies nobody cares about.

These sidewalks are broken and so are a lot of windows. Kids are looking out of second and third stories,

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sitting on the sills. Young adults are gathered on porches and balconies, carefully ignoring us, laughing, hugging their main squeeze, puffing on a joint laced with who knows what, and wondering who we are and what we are doing in their neighborhood.

Those training to be preachers must see this is not a game. It is not an adventure. Most gang members aren't interested in hearing about Jesus or in trading their guns for Bibles. Sometimes they spit on us or dump foul-smelling stuff out of windows onto us. When we crank up the volume on our portable microphones, they turn up their music. When one of us launches into a testimony, they start hooting and insulting us.

If we get close enough to offer help, we may be met with hostility. Or we may find a hurting, broken spirit ready to come to Jesus. That is why we humiliate ourselves, offering ourselves repeatedly up for rejection by people who desperately need what we offer.

Gang members may threaten us with guns. On more than one occasion, we have been shot at and our people hospitalized — and our vehicles looted.

So here on the dirty, smelly, noisy street, our new preachers-in-training get to experience what it is to have a willingness to die for Christ. I hope that's what they signed up for! Going with us, they may experience for the first time the bitter taste of fear. But we will stand. We will preach openly about our pasts — and how Jesus has changed our hearts so that we may live in joy and love and peace.

Maybe one of our street veterans — somebody 28 or older — will tell of how most of the homeboys he used

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to hang with now are dead, in prison, or are addicts. He can testify that the gangs aren't going to take you anywhere but down.

Maybe he will preach about growing up in the 'hood, partying with his homies, smoking marijuana and using crack — then spending time in jail for assault, drug possession and auto theft.

Then perhaps he can give his testimony of how with a bullet in his thigh, he finally decided to change his ways after the Emergency Room nurse told him his best friend just died. And how he stopped gangbanging since he was afraid one of his family members might get shot by being mistaken for him.

He can tell how he removed the graffiti he had sprayed on a building and apologized to the property owner, who was so impressed he helped him enroll in a trade school to study welding — but that it wasn't enough. He still got high and still got busted and still was breaking into people's houses to get money.

Then he can tell about getting blasted in the chest by a shotgun in the dark and how in the prison's physical rehabilitation ward, he had to learn how to use his left arm to write and how he turned to the Bible, which he read on nights when his friends were drinking moonshine in the next bed.

Then maybe his testimony will intensify as the Spirit of the Lord falls on him and he proclaims the urgency of the hour and how young people whose lives are in trouble must not turn Jesus away tonight.

This is how we train our preachers. Not everybody is meant for this kind of ministry. There are three ele-

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ments involved in the making of our kind of preacher.

First of all, you must have a heavenly call. Now, not everybody is going to make it out there — especially someone who is not called into the ministry by God Almighty Himself.

We need lots of preachers. If we're going to take continents and countries and cities for the glory of God, we must have workers.

But those preachers had better have heard a divine call into this preaching ministry. If you haven't been called, then you have no business preaching. Preaching is not a career that a man chooses for himself. It is not a profession that you go into because your grandmother paid your loan shark so he would leave you alone at the rehab.

Becoming a preacher is not a way of gaining status or a way of getting ahead. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16, "For although I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of." He said he couldn't be proud or consider himself better than other people because he preached the Gospel. Instead, "for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel."

He says he had no choice.

"Woe unto me if I preach not the Gospel."

So it had better be with you if you want to preach in our neighborhoods. A Victory Outreach preacher must be summoned by Almighty God to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Something has to have transpired between he and God.

You will know when you're being called.

There is a deep certainty in your heart when God's

hand is on your life. There is a feeling of purpose. It can happen in a worship service. You may hear the call during an altar call. A still small voice may erupt within you during your quiet time with the Lord.

It may happen right now while you are reading the pages of this book. Something may be birthed inside of you, right where you sit. As you take in the words on this page, the Spirit of God may come upon you and separate you for the work of the ministry.

And let me tell you: when you have been ordained by God to be a preacher, life is not going to become easier. And nothing is going to stop you. You may be called upon to build a church, even when your friends think you are crazy. You will speak in public, even when your words are not polished and 12-year-olds are throwing garbage at you.

You will knock on doors, knowing you don't have the natural ability to sell anything. You will teach the Bible with little or no formal education — depending on the Holy Spirit to give you utterance. You will manage a non-profit corporation, ignorant of advertising and finances and office procedure.

How? With God's calling will come the equipping, and God's enabling for you to accomplish His purpose.

I said the first element in the making of a preacher is a divine call. The second is supernatural grace.

The grace of God is unmerited favor. It is given to us although we don't deserve it.

A few days ago, my father-in-law came back from a banquet all excited. He tried to describe how, when the guest speaker had gotten up, there had been something

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supernatural “all over him.” My father-in-law was flabbergasted. He said, “Oh, oh, I just felt, I just felt *chills*. I felt the anointing of God as he spoke.”

My father-in-law described how this ex-drug addict from Brazil got up and started speaking with such authority and such anointing, that there was no mistaking that God was with him.

What my father-in-law was trying to describe was the grace of God upon that young speaker. It's an anointing. In the power of the Holy Spirit, you will say things you never even imagined you would say. You will bring a message and some parts of it will be things that you've never even studied — but which you received as a revelation from God.

After you leave the platform, it may take you a few hours to come down. You're filled with the Holy Spirit and overflowing and it's like a high, only you are coherent and loving and filled with righteous compassion. You may go to bed and be unable sleep for hours because of the anointing that is on you.

You're so turned on, so high in the Spirit and in the anointing of God, that it takes a while to be able to return to normal. This is the grace of God upon the servants of the Lord.

What is the third element in the making of a preacher? Hard work. There is no birth without labor. There are no spiritual children without travail. Everyone with aspirations to be a minister must come broken before the Lord, feeling the burden for ministry and carrying a weight of compassion for the world — just as Jesus had for the multitudes.

It cannot be mechanical. It cannot be faked. Sometimes we rely on our giftedness, our abilities and our personal charisma. But that is not enough. As someone said, "No pain, no gain." We must be willing to work; we must be willing to dedicate ourselves; we must be willing to separate ourselves; we must be willing to travail before God.

And you cannot travail before somebody you do not know. A preacher must be a man of prayer. We have to get on our knees before the Almighty and get to know Him.

Prayer alone will not produce a leader. Paul was a leader — but leading terribly and in the wrong direction — before he met Jesus. Just like Paul, you cannot be an effective preacher if you do not pray. Just as plants require water, you require prayer. You need others to bathe you in their prayers — but you also need to pray.

It is easy for a busy preacher to say, "I don't have enough time." Sleep, family, and ministry all get in the way, competing for our hearts, minds and time.

Success often lessens our urgency for prayer. As a work gains momentum, needs change, but not the need for prayer. A struggling, pioneer work needs prayer for support to keep it alive. An established outreach needs prayer for direction. But both organizations need prayer just as urgently.

A preacher must depend on God in prayer. We must ask Him to do what we can't. For example, we cannot permeate our projects with his Spirit, so we must ask Him to do so.

We cannot prepare the hearts of our listeners nor

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know what they need to hear — so we have to ask God to make our listeners into fertile ground and to make our preaching into powerful seed.

My prayer life becomes extremely effective when I can give up control, accepting God's leadership. This is difficult at times! Leaders can be strong-willed and opinionated — and can feel awkward and uncomfortable when not in control. It is so much easier to tell God to approve what we have already decided to preach than to say, "Thy will be done." Sometimes it is not at all easy to wait for Him to reveal His will.

It is far easier to push ahead in our own strength — then ask Him to bless the mess we have created.

But I must remember that I am not the ultimate leader. The Lord is. I am His servant, not the Master. Sometimes kneeling physically helps me remember this. Sometimes even saying the words, "You are God and I am not," can be a good idea.

We must humble ourselves in His mighty presence and recognize Him as our Ultimate Leader, then seek His will, wait for Him to reveal it to us, and be willing to carry it out. We must ask Him to guide us — in whatever we are doing. We can be unaware of a need to change direction and the need for Him to give us a mid-course correction.

We must also ask for strength and then pledge that in His strength, we will give our maximum effort.

If we will ask Him for direction and guidance and strength, and if we will wait for His answer, we can come out of a time of prayer with dynamic and exhilarating peace.

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There is such confidence in knowing we are in the Lord's will. That confidence lets us concentrate on the task ahead.

Chapter 8

The visionary church

Maybe you grew up in a neighborhood like Los Angeles' Pico-Union. Fifty gangs with more than 2,000 members occupy the area patrolled by the Rampart division police, near downtown Los Angeles. Under the drone of circling police helicopters, walls, gates, garage doors and fences are scrawled with graffiti.

Ugly emblems defile kids' necks, their bare shoulders, their hands and even their foreheads. These tattoos etched in sloppy, hand-done blue ink proclaim their membership in such gangs as 18th Street, Mara Salvatrucha or the Crazy Riders.

Armed with automatic weapons and hyped by the violence they see on television and in the movies, gang members have today made random killings the norm.

But murders are down, the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper reported this morning. So far this year, police count only 88 homicides in the few blocks that make up Pico-

Union — still astronomically above the national average. A nearby hospital has a M*A*S*H look about it as it provides field training for U.S. military medics in treating real-life battlefield wounds.

Death looms large here. It touches many. It loves the young. It seduces them. The gangs prey on universal human needs. They offer brotherhood. They claim to fill the human need for intimacy. They watch your back. But they suck you dry. Quitting means being branded a coward, and being shunned by your friends and sometimes your family.

When you become a gang member, it's hard to get out. For those who stay in, crime, prison and death await.

I have a vision for Pico-Union.

Only such a vision can break through this darkness. That is why ours is a vision-driven ministry. The driving force behind what we do is our vision.

If we're going to be able to accomplish what God has called us to do, then we must hold onto this vision — or else be discouraged by what we see all around us. It would be very easy to just retreat from areas like this.

There are whole blocks that the police will not enter unless they can come in force with massive back-up. Traditional churches fled long ago. So, what are we doing here?

Common sense tells me that a quiet ministry in rural Vermont makes better sense. Maybe I should start a beach ministry in South Carolina or on Cape Cod.

But there is the problem of the vision that God has given me. I am called to the inner city. I am called to the inner cities of the world — and there are so many that we

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have not yet reached Could I sit in a beach bungalow with my feet propped up — knowing that the vision has not yet been fulfilled?

I don't think so, because "where sin abounds, the grace of God does much more abound."

I came to a crossroads in my ministry a few years ago when I had to decide whether I was going to pull in the crowds by promoting myself — or if I was going to go with the vision that God had given me.

The Lord had never told me to make myself into a superstar — but other people were doing it quite successfully. He had not told me to build up a ministry where people would pack the pews to hear me speak. But some very big churches were being built around strong personalities.

Even today, some enormous ministries are centered around a man. Crowds fill stadiums to hear him speak. Such ministries with powerful crusades have enormous impact and win whole cities to the Lord.

Big names bring in big bucks, too — the big money I could see that Victory Outreach needs to win the inner cities for Jesus.

But if I was going to go with the hype and hoopla of Hollywood and turn myself into a media celebrity and a household name, then I needed to become that personality.

Could I do it?

It would be exhilarating. It would be incredible. It would require sacrifice, but I could do it. My flesh said "Yes!"

But my heart said, "No."

That's not totally accurate. My spirit said, "No," too. My conscience yelled, "No." That still, small voice that is so easy to ignore urgently whispered, "No."

My ego said, "Go for it!"

But the answer was still, "No."

It was just not my style. It certainly was not the vision for Victory Outreach. The Lord showed me that it would be destructive to our vision. Our junkies and crackheads and hookers and homeboys can only turn their ruined lives around by looking to Jesus.

Our street people and addicts needed to have their eyes on a far more dependable role model than me, our Lord Jesus Christ.

A church built around a human figurehead is weak. The vision for Victory Outreach was for it to be strong — doing effective battle at the very gates of hell.

A church centered around a man can be exciting. However, when that preacher is not there, the people stay away. If they know that the superstar is out of town, they sleep in.

I didn't want a church like that.

I want faithful, consecrated people who are dedicated to the Lord, not yearning to touch my hand or have a brief, inspiring moment with me. I want people who are hungry for the Word, no matter who is in the pulpit. And it could not happen if I went off on a self-promotional superstar kick.

This ministry's vision is clear. The Lord called us out of darkness into His glorious light to be an international ministry, evangelizing and discipling the hurting people of the world. Ours is a message of hope, not hero

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worship. Our focus is to be on Jesus Christ — not on some preacher, namely me.

Our vision includes a commitment to plan and develop churches, rehabilitation homes and training centers in strategic cities of the world.

Our mission is to inspire and instill within our people a desire to fulfill their God-given potential in life, and to live with a sense of dignity, belonging and destiny!

God has not called us to be a ministry built around a personality. He has called us to be family! A real family doesn't fall apart when its human founding father goes to his heavenly reward. But a weak ministry propped up around a superstar does.

That's why even enormous ministries with beautiful buildings and impressive programs and faithful financial partners begin to diminish as their superstar fades. When he is no longer what they think he should be, the people scatter.

And when he dies, the ministry withers away to dust as well.

Why? Because it was built on a human personality, not on Jesus Christ.

The Lord has shown me that such a superstar labors under a terrible burden. The entire structure, the whole organization, the reason that people come, the reason that they give financially— all rests on his shoulders.

What a terrible weight.

What awful bondage for any man, particularly a man who knows in his heart that he is not the great guru that the adoring crowds demand that he be.

In his heart, such a man knows that he is frail and

weak and that he has failed God by allowing the thousands to adore him instead of forming their own personal relationships with Christ.

I could not do that to our vision. I could not do it to my church family. I could not let my people down if our mission was to be fulfilled.

I knew that the Lord desired Victory Outreach to be much more than me.

The vision has to be the driving force — not me. I was not called to raise up a people who would phone the office and ask, “Is Pastor Sonny going to be speaking here Sunday? When *will* he be speaking?”

The Lord wants a church of people so filled with the vision of our purpose and a driving desire to win the world for Jesus Christ, that they would come on Sundays mornings and Sunday nights and Tuesdays and Wednesdays and Fridays and Saturdays, no matter who was speaking — or even if nobody was.

Listen, I know churches that have thousands on Sunday mornings when the superstar is on stage and under the lights. But if you come back for Wednesday night prayer and intercession, the few that attend have to meet in a Sunday school classroom — since it would be embarrassing for their tiny group to use the vast auditorium.

The thirty or forty faithful would rattle around in that cavernous sanctuary — a humiliating testimony to the absent multitudes.

Come to our prayer meetings at the La Puente church — where this ministry started and which I use as my home base. Sometimes I speak. More often I do not. Still the place is packed — even on weekend nights when our

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East L.A. culture says we should all be out going to dinner and partying and having a good time at a fancy club — not kneeling beside some rehab dude who is blubbering to Jesus about how sorry he is for wasting his youthful years.

On any Sunday morning, come see how many wonderful people fill our multiple worship services. Sometimes I am the speaker. Quite frequently I am not. It does not matter to them. The people come to worship Jesus.

They fill the place so they can fellowship with one another in Christian love and acceptance and know that they are family. They open their Bibles and take careful notes and nod their heads and say “Amen” whether I am bringing the sermon or if it is one of the other pastors or staff members — or a guest or one of our missionaries back home to visit.

This pleases God!

It delights me, too.

Sure, with cleverness, I could have built Victory Outreach with hype and hoopla and Hollywood. It could have turned me into the main attraction superstar.

But I would much rather have a visionary church, full of dedicated, consecrated co-workers, with their eyes on Jesus and their hearts devoted to our vision of world-wide ministry.

Chapter 9

Get with the program!

Out in Van Nuys, one of our ministry specialists is making the gang boys sweat. He is not preaching with righteous words.

Instead, he is demonstrating some righteous moves. The gym is heavy with the sound of fists on pads.

This is not your ordinary Sunday school.

One of the teachers, some say, was Southern California's greatest young kick boxer. He was a silver medalist in the 1984 Olympics. He had stayed away from his neighborhood's gang while he was training for the Olympics. After the games, he built an impressive record as a featherweight. But on Oct. 9, 1988, he was convicted on two assault charges.

"I had a real bad temper," he confesses simply.

Another of the instructors is said to be one of the

world's top-ranked super-lightweight fighters. He orders the teens to jog in place until they are soaked with perspiration. A young man with his gang's name scrawled in a blue tattoo across his chest, makes sharp exhaling noises and shadow boxes into the air.

A half-smile softens these steely-eyed teachers' faces. None of these kids could afford to pay for the professional training they're giving away here for free.

Twice a week, they and others lead gang members through grueling training sessions at neighborhood recreation centers, as well as in a well-known L.A. gym, is frequented by the rich and famous.

The kids in this class are street rivals. As they line up warily along the walls of the gym — they scope each other out. Hatred lingers in their eyes and hardness glares from their young hearts.

This program is powerful and effective. These kick-boxers and Olympic boxers — some whom you have seen in movies and on TV — are not just preaching Jesus to these kids. They are demonstrating loving Christian manhood.

And they have engineered a truce between warring teen gangs. Key leaders have agreed to stop killing one another.

Leaning against the walls, these young gang soldiers now complain aloud about truce-breakers and trouble-makers who are dishing out disrespect — which is sufficient grounds for a new outbreak of death and violence. They talk about revenge against rivals standing against the far wall, who they say “dis” them.

“I don't want to be judged by them,” says one boy

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whose shirt is the same color as all those standing around him with their bandanas holding up their well-greased hair.

These kids have agreed to put down their weapons — out of respect for the teachers. But they make no attempt to hide their disrespect for one another.

“Like, I know those *vatos*,” one kid spits, using Mexican street slang for “dude” to refer to his rivals standing along the far wall. “Man, how come they have to come around here wearing their hats? How come they have to *mad dog* us?”

Prior to class, some slouched in small clusters, some smoking marijuana to steel their nerves. Once through the door, they stood along the wall, keeping their distance from their enemies.

Sure, gangs have agreed to put down their weapons before. The Bloods and the Crips, the two main factions of African-American gangs, began talking about peace in the spring of 1992. That truce broke down.

When trouble flared again, a new treaty was declared. Hispanic gangs started putting down their guns when an adult gang called the Mexican Mafia — which claims to control California’s prisons — ordered a halt to drive-by killings.

But it was the Victory Outreach boxers, along with a group from the Church on the Way who were responsible for this local truce — along with our youth workers, one of them an ex-drug dealer whose four brothers were murdered. Another instructor is a respected 50ish ex-gang leader who came to Jesus and entered the ministry while serving 32 years in prison for two murders.

“It’s hard to have a peace treaty with guys who have shot at you, but if you’re going to have a peace treaty, you have to let it go,” he says to an 18-year-old member of the Pacoima Criminals gang. He slouches against the wall.

“Everyone is tired of losing family,” admits a Pacoima Flats Nightowls member who says two of his brothers were killed in gang fights.

Our Victory Outreach guys pray fervently for guidance before they try this sort of thing. And they pray throughout the session. “This afternoon, as we stand with our heads bowed, I just realize that something special is happening, Lord, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart,” prays one of our guys.

His is an obvious and immediate rapport with the young men he is teaching. When he goes up on his toes to demonstrate a move, he moves catlike, his self-control amazing for his age. When he tells the whole group to give him 50 push-ups, there is barely a groan of complaint.

People would pay him a lot for the training he is donating. He shrugs. “I’m making treasures in heaven,” he says. Treasures out of darkness — that’s Victory Outreach.

We have other programs, too.

Parenting support groups. Prayer groups. Bible study groups. Weekday groups.

Women’s groups.

Men’s groups.

Singles’ groups.

Kids groups.

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Even baseball teams.

Some churches' ministries are driven by their programs. Our programs are driven by our ministry's vision.

Some churches have so many programs that is difficult to keep up with them.

Their whole emphasis is on their programs and their special events. It's as if they have to keep the saints busy, busy, busy. If you keep them busy, you keep them out of trouble — supposedly.

Some congregations are event-driven, bouncing from one special thing to another just to keep their calendar full and everybody busy.

There is a popular trend these days for churches to be customer-driven. The staff does elaborate market surveys identifying the needs and wants of the congregation.

If there is a need for basket-weaving, then basket-weaving is added. If the teens all want to fly to Hawaii for a luau, then a way is found for them to go.

Humor is "terribly important," I just read in an article for preachers. "But sarcasm or the put-down are out. Paradox is in. Successful pulpit humorists offer a kind of self-depreciating wit that sees the irony in modern life." Huh?

Another article refers to "spiritual consumers" who, we must understand, are always "trying new churches and swapping traditions." In order to draw them in, the preacher must be an effective communicator and entertainer. Sunday school lessons must be written carefully to be non-threatening and undemanding. Nobody should

be expected to pray publicly or be put on the spot to answer a question or read Scripture. Everyone is encouraged to speak as much or as little as they desire.

The teacher takes the attitude that he is not an autocrat or a dictator, so he does not have the right to set the topic — that a group consensus must be developed and that everybody should be comfortable and given an opportunity to explore issues important to them.

As a result, such a class goes nowhere. Week after week, one member bores everybody with long-winded stories about how he is struggling with his baseball card collection. The teacher sits with the class, smiling and nodding and asking everybody “How do you feel about that?” but not inserting his own values or judgments.

The idea is that “The customer is always right” and that as servants, we are here to satisfy the whims and fads of the people. I have my sincere doubts about that.

The Shepherd must guide his flock and lead them; and the flock must follow the Shepherd. The Shepherd has a God-given authority and an obligation to lead the people and instruct them in the things of the Lord. The Kingdom of God is not a democracy.

At Victory Outreach, it is often difficult to tell the difference between clergy and laity. In some big churches, there is a vast gulf between them. The clergy makes up a whole class of people who do everything and are even officially called “the religious.” Everybody else sits and kneels and stands when they are told.

I don’t see any of that anywhere in the New Testament. I see that as minister, I am called to equip people for ministry. I see that all believers are called to become

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vital, hard-working members of a royal priesthood — everybody!. Nobody gets to sit back and be a pew-warmer. We are all needed in battle!

And it is raging all around us!

You know, I get Christian leadership magazines that baffle me. An article on my desk discusses “misuse of prayer” — such as bothering God unnecessarily.

Well, I see that we are to pray without ceasing — which means that as I walk past my secretary, I thank God that He sent her to me. As I open the door to my office, I praise the Lord that I have another exciting day in which to serve Him. As I look at the people waiting in my office with hurt on their faces, I ask the Lord to give me wisdom for their problem and show me God’s way out of whatever crisis they are facing.

I have actually read articles that say this kind of prayer cheapens prayer, takes God for granted and does not treat Him with the respect which He is due. These articles say that we are failing to live in the real world — instead we are looking for “pie in the sky in the sweet by-and-by,” using God as a crutch when we are perfectly capable of handling things on our own.

They say that God helps those who help themselves and that He should not be bothered with the petty things.

Give me a break! He is not cheapened by my humble prayers! He is high and lifted up and the mighty provider of my day! I yearn that His will be done on earth, just as it is in heaven. I desire for Him to give me this day and my daily bread — and I am not interested in it coming from any other source. He is my only true provider!

And because I am human, I kneel at His feet, beg-

ging that He deliver me from temptation, because I am just a man and I do wrong things without Him. I don't just make mistakes.

I sin. I hope that doesn't shock you.

I sin and so do you — and in the pulpit, we preachers had better get back to dealing with it.

For generations, great preachers were expected to blast away at sin — and to make sinners uncomfortable. Billy Sunday ranted. So did Dwight L. Moody. The great colonial-era preacher Jonathan Edwards painted elaborate word pictures of sinners in the hands of an angry God.

One of the funniest parts in Mark Twain's stories of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn is about how one of the boys is stunned that all his buddies have been to a revival and quit smoking corncob pipes or cussing or raiding watermelon patches since the revival preacher has convinced them that they were in immediate danger of hellfire and eternal damnation if they kept it up.

The kids on the street could use a little of that today. No, they need a lot of it!

But somehow preaching has become chatty storytelling and feelgood stuff. Preachers who lack a sense of drama or clever wit are not invited as guest speakers. Preachers are supposed to offer helpful insights, not stern and correcting judgments. Church leaders are frightened that listeners might withhold their tithes and offerings if the congregation resents words that pry into the filthy and hypocritical state of their sinful lives.

That is prostitution!

That is a sell-out of the Gospel!

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We are here to change lives, not coddle the secret alcoholics and tax-evaders and lounge lizards in our midst pretending that they really are nice people. No, they are sinners! They are going to burn in hell unless they turn their lives over to Jesus!

And we are failing if we let them go to hell without letting them know that their sin is wrong and that it separates them from their loving God!

But, “Pastor Sonny,” you may say, “I have this book on church growth and it counsels against shouting in the pulpit. If you want a big church, you need to make people feel better about themselves, not worse. They will come to church if you help them feel good — not bad!”

I have friends whose churches are big into “church growth.” Well, Victory Outreach is dedicated to growth as well. But these churches have turned the process of growth into a secular science, based on corporate principles and demographic projections. Entire books fill shelves in Christian bookstores, devoted to the marketing and positioning that it takes to develop an enormous congregation. Some of these books are wonderful tools—making many of the same points found in this book.

There is a lot of stuff from the business world now coming into the leadership of churches. They’ve taken a lot from secular books. Some of it is good, but we’ve got to be so careful. A church is different than a secular organization. We are not here just to please the people. Something terrible happens when a preacher is scared to offend his flock and just gives them what he thinks the majority wants.

Jesus didn’t do that. The influential people of His

time who could have helped him to “network” himself out into the community were constantly offended by everything He had to say. He didn’t put them on committees — He called them a brood of vipers and denounced them as whitewashed tombs filled with rotting corpses.

Instead of studying market surveys that could have helped Him win the favor of Herod and the leaders of the religious culture, Jesus instead kicked their profitable venders and moneychangers out of the Temple, healed the sick on the Sabbath, stopped mobs from killing harlots, and hiked around rural Palestine with uneducated nobodies whom He had told to quit their jobs.

Jesus was not out to win a popularity contest. Within three years, he threatened every public official in Judea so completely that none of them stepped up to stop his unfair public execution on false charges. One of the few popular leaders who did follow Him, a legislator named Nicodemus, sneaked around at night to meet with Jesus — so nobody would be upset that they had met.

Jesus did not position Himself or His message properly, a church growth expert would tell us. The Bible doesn’t indicate that He attempted a single fund-raising campaign. He certainly ignored consensus building.

But He loved the people — and told them what they needed to hear. On at least one occasion, His words made them so angry that they attempted to push Him off a cliff.

And following His example, the Apostle Paul managed to get himself publicly whipped, chained, stoned and left for dead, then kept in house arrest for fearlessly speaking the truth.

Why? Because Paul loved people, just as Jesus had

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loved him enough to stop him on the road to Damascus and change his life forever.

We need to love, too. We need to care for our people. We've got to say things that may not be popular. I can't think of any preacher who is really doing a work of God, who is trying to win a popularity contest. Preachers in the New Testament were beheaded, stoned, crucified upside down and left to die on desert islands.

And the Gospel swept over the world. Western culture was transformed.

The early preachers went through terrible persecution. They were killed, they were fed to lions in front of cheering crowds. They were burned at the stake. They were pierced with arrows — because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not always popular.

Sometimes you have to say things that are not going to make people very happy. You have to expose sin within the congregation.

People don't like that.

And so this “spiritual consumer,” “customer-is-always-right” mentality, this people-pleasing ministry does not work — except maybe to build up more whitewashed tombs full of rotting corpses. We cannot compromise the Gospel.

We cannot compromise what is right and still be able to accomplish what God has called us to do.

I believe with all my heart that the church must be driven with vision — not by any of these other elements.

Victory Outreach, praise God, is a vision-driven ministry. We're guided, directed, and controlled by what we believe are the Biblical purposes of our ministry.

That's why we talk a lot about vision.

Jesus said in Matthew 16, "I will build My church." Praise God that we have this promise.

He said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." When God says He's going to build, He's going to build. Proverbs 19:20 says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purposes that prevail."

Every ministry within the church should be vision-driven. That means no baby-sitters — instead the people who keep the nursery should prepare themselves as ministers to the very young. So much can be taught to a little toddler. I bet you can sing the old favorite, "Jesus Loves Me."

When did you learn it? You can't remember, can you?

You were so little that you don't even recall singing it for the first time. You can't recall Miss Marie or whatever your teacher's name was who sat down on the rug with you and sang that "little ones to Him belong. We are weak, but He is strong."

That gave you a vision of Jesus.

It still does.

Throughout these pages, I have been talking about vision. The title of this book even has the word in it. I want you to understand vision so that you can define it for yourself and so that you understand its vital importance. I want you to "internalize" the vision — to so completely grasp it and its importance that you hold it in your heart and weigh it in your every decision. Vision must be your driving force.

Vision enables us to accomplish the purposes God has for us.

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I sometimes use the words “vision” and “mission” and “calling” and also “purpose” interchangeably. Vision is the purpose of our existence. In the Bible, when it talks about purpose, it’s talking about vision. Paul says, “I have a purpose, and the purposes of God.” He’s talking about the vision he received from God to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The definition of the word “drive” is to guide, control and direct. So I’m using “drive” purposely when we talk about the vision-driven church.

It’s very important for us to understand that the vision of the church is supposed to guide, to control, and direct the church. When you’re driving a car, what do you do? You guide it. You control it. You’re directing that car, right?

What should be controlling our church? It should be the vision that God has given to us.

Every ministry is driven.

We have talked about churches that are customer-driven. We have talked about churches that are growth-driven. Well, there are also some churches that are so driven by tradition that even God can’t move them.

The reason He can’t move them — and cannot move through them — is because they’re set in their ways. They say, “We have to do it the way we always did it. We have to do it the way our people did it 100 years ago.”

A hundred years ago they did it this way, and two hundred years ago they did it this way, and that’s the way that it has to be done. They’re so caught up in their man-made tradition that they are as dead as their founders buried in the graveyard outside. Yet they tremble at the

very idea of changing anything and say, “We’ve always done it this way.”

Tradition can be a good thing. It reminds us of who we are and where we have been. Observing the Passover is a tradition. Celebrating Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday is a tradition. But you can get so caught up in dead traditions that you can’t get out of the ruts. You can be stuck in a system that can’t be changed — even by the mighty, gentle wind of the Holy Spirit.

There are Christians who are tradition-driven, too. Charter members who helped found a church can be like that. Whenever there is change, they can’t adapt. They grumble, “Oh, the church is not like the way it used to be. All this modernism is coming in, and all these methods, and all these ideas, and I remember in the beginning the way we used to be.”

They always want to take you back instead of forward. But as a church begins to grow, as the ministry begins to expand, there needs to be change.

Whenever an innovative pastor comes into a tradition-driven church or if a vision-driven minister is hired, he gets frustrated. He tries to change things, but everything is set in concrete. He can’t buck the system — which makes absolutely no sense to him and really cannot be justified by anybody except to say “We’ve always done it that way.”

Sometimes he may be trying to accomplish the purposes of God, but his denominational overseers are concerned that he is not conforming to their mandatory, 150-year-old, internal procedures. He may be getting behind in their projections for hiring a choirmaster or getting

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the old memorial prayer chapel renovated, or he is not reporting enough committee meetings — or perhaps there needs to be a review of his doctrinal beliefs.

Even in churches that are locally run, you can find yourself with a board that is unnecessarily controlling and will not allow anything to change. I know about a congregation whose pastor was given a vision from God for the unchurched kids in his town. He had a yearning and a hunger for all of those kids playing outside on Sunday mornings to come to Jesus.

However, his board was quite content with their structured and proper Sunday services — which might be disrupted by a bunch of unscrubbed and undisciplined brats squirming in the pews. They might make paper airplanes out of the bulletins that the bulletin committee had so carefully chosen after weeks of consideration from the pretty catalog sent by the bulletin supply house.

So, the pastor enlisted members of the church to put on a Saturday morning outreach to all the kids who were not welcome at Sunday school. They had games. They had crafts. They sang songs. They went on hikes. They learned about Jesus. Every week kids were saved. Every Saturday, 9-year-olds to 12-year-olds and even 15-year-olds gave their hearts to the Lord and were baptized in front of their friends.

The board put up with it for awhile. But they were increasingly irritated. The preacher had gone around them. He had followed his vision rather than doing things like they had always been done.

So the board nailed him on finances. Look at all the money he had spent fixing up two old donated

schoolbuses to gather the kids. Look at the unbudgeted expenditures on gas and oil and maintenance. Look at all the money being spent on children's literature.

And had it been a wise financial investment? These kids didn't tithe! There had been no return! Their parents hadn't shown up yet or offered to help defray the expenses!

These children's families were just a bunch of deadbeats and unlikely to contribute anything to the ministry! Furthermore, these street urchins were not the board's financial responsibility! Just look at the shape of the carpet! Look at all the dirty handprints on the walls of the baptistery — it would have to be repainted!

The preacher thought about quitting.

But his vision for the kids would not let him.

So the board fired him.

Immediately the children's Saturday outreach was shut down. The congregation's budget was no longer strained.

And the kids resumed playing in the streets on Sunday mornings as the church members drove past with the windows rolled up and their doors locked.

Well, fortunately, this story has a happy ending. Four miles down the road, a church of the same denomination called a preacher who had come to the Lord while in prison. He didn't know anything about tradition or proper procedures.

But he sure could preach. He attacked sin. He cast out Satan. He prayed for people to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And he noticed all these neighborhood kids on Sunday mornings who were not in church.

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He announced that the Lord had given him a vision. Why not have a Saturday morning outreach for them?

Within weeks, he had an old bus donated from another church 30 miles away. He didn't even have the money to repaint its sides, so it looked like this distant church was extending its reach — which was not exactly the case.

Before long, the new preacher's baptistery walls needed to be repainted, too — but his board praised God for those dirty handprints. And his Sunday school classrooms were packed to capacity. And his board increased their personal giving to pay for the teaching materials.

Why? Because this congregation was not bound up and enslaved by the way they had always done things. They were bold enough to hire an ex-convict who had gotten his preaching credentials in a correspondence course. They didn't get in his way when the Lord gave him the vision for kids.

A vision is a powerful thing.

If a preacher is forced by a church to put aside his vision, he'll die with that church — or leave.

Fleeing such a mess is his best move. He needs to move on to another church where he's able to freely put into practice what God has laid upon his heart.

He needs to be able to follow the vision — not be a slave to the programs.

Chapter 10

A vision-driven ministry

Does your church have a barbershop ministry? No? Why not?

One of our Los Angeles-area churches has one across from MacArthur Park, which was made famous in a 1970s rock song.

Across from this park for the last 18 years, one of our converts, a silver-haired great-grandfather, has told his customers his testimony while he clips their hair

He tells of getting drunk nightly with drinking buddies until eventually he landed in the hospital with a stroke. There somebody witnessed to him and, as he puts it, “My life changed around completely.”

So did his barbershop.

Within days of his release by the doctor, the girlie magazines that once were scattered on countertops were

replaced by tracts, Christian magazines and Spanish-language Bibles. The nudie posters hanging from the mirrors at the shop's 14 work stations came down as well.

Soon they were replaced with Christian stickers and posters proclaiming such things as, "*Jesus is my **ROCK AND my name is on the ROLL!***", "*Jesucristo es mi señor,*" and "*My God is not dead, sorry about yours.*" Gone was the booze he used to stash in the drawers.

Drop by some morning and you'll find his shop packed with patrons who actually show up before their appointment to listen to a few Scriptures and sing along to a praise chorus while he bangs a tambourine against his leg.

There's no such thing here as a haircut without a hallelujah or a perm without a prayer. No new customer leaves without a business card that asks, "What must I do to be saved?"

Flip it over and you will find the answer.

During your haircut, this barber may ask you about your family or your job, and you can be sure that the conversation will turn to Jesus Christ.

The owner says the Bible tells him to preach the gospel to everybody and that includes guys whose hair needs a trim. He says the Scriptures say that Jesus is present wherever two or more are gathered — and that includes barber shops.

"There are a lot of lost people out there," he says. "Lost to drugs, booze, prostitution. Seems like you can get anything on our streets."

"When I started working here," says one of the employees, "I felt very sad and alone because of my prob-

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lems. I began to listen and pray and I noticed a change, something that I could feel here in my heart, a peacefulness. It was God.”

But not everyone pays attention. Some just come in for a haircut.

“Some people tune me out,” the owner admits. “But I always try to tell the younger guys who come in what I went through in my life, how I solved my problems. I listen to their worries. They can’t find work regularly. They don’t want to turn to crime. We pray on it, and I know they feel better when they leave.

“My work is not to convert my customers or my employees. I have 12 workers, and I hear them and customers talk among themselves about hangovers and too much partying. It reminds me of myself when I used to be out there and I tell them, ‘I used to be exactly like you, but God transformed my life.’

“You know, the Lord has all kinds of people doing his work. People with ministries at hospitals, under big tents, at revivals. And then he’s got me in the shampoo room.”

He’s a barber with a vision.

He has probably won more people to the Lord than many churches. Why? Because he is vision-driven. How can you develop your own vision-driven ministry?

I want to give you the key parts of a vision-driven ministry. The first is that you must define your vision. It’s very important in new church planning or establishing a pioneer church. You need to clarify and define the vision of your ministry.

What if it is an established church or maybe the work

of a department within a church? If the ministry is lifeless, dead, and dying, then you need to redefine the vision. You have to understand it. At the same time, you also need to be able to explain it to your co-workers, so they can catch it, too.

A national survey done some years back asked members of several hundred congregations, "What is the vision of your church?"

The survey showed that 89 percent thought the vision and the purpose of the church was to "take care of me, take care of my family, and take care of my needs."

Only 11 percent said the vision of the church was to win the world.

Then the pollsters looked at the answers given by the pastors of those same churches. Ten percent said, "It's our job to take care of the members' needs" while 90 percent of the pastors said, "It is our job to win the world."

Can you imagine the conflict and confusion in those churches? If they can't agree on the vision and mission and purpose, how can they go into battle together?

They can't.

And that's why so many churches spend their time embroiled in political intrigues, leadership conflicts and such absurd debates as what color of fabric to use to re-upholster the pews.

The pastors in the survey had a vision, but they didn't manage to communicate it to 89 percent of their people. No wonder there is conflict.

No wonder a church board would be upset about kids' dirty handprints on the baptistery walls. Such a board is not praising God that the little lost souls of the neighbor-

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hood are getting won to Jesus and being baptized. No, such board members are worried about their own selfish needs — which include having a nice church building where they can come without being bothered by the lost.

A vision must be shared. A preacher can't accomplish something his congregation does not buy into.

All those ministries with thousands of people, and those ministries growing tremendously have a clear-cut identity. They may not be plugged into the vision that Victory Outreach has, but they're plugged into something. They're driven by a vision of their own. They understand their reason for being. They know what God has called them to do. They understand the business they're in. It gives them a sense of direction.

Each department within the church needs to buy into the vision. For example, what is the purpose of a church's rehabilitation home? If you have one vision, your church's leadership has another, and the staff has another — and none of them coincide, then you will accomplish a lot less than if you agree together.

That is why at Victory Outreach we read our mission statement together so frequently. We need reminders. Maybe new folks have never heard it. People who have been gone and have come back need to hear it.

And if somebody comes to visit and wants to know what Victory Outreach is all about, our mission statement answers a lot of questions.

The second part of a vision-driven ministry is morale. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, the Apostle Paul tells us to let there be real harmony so there won't be any splits in the church. Be of one mind, he advises, united in thought

and vision. Common goals always reduce conflict within a ministry. Conflict comes when everybody is moving their own way and everybody has their own agenda. But when everybody is focusing on a common goal, it reduces the conflict.

It reduces conflict within the rehab homes, within the home study groups, and within the support groups. It reduces conflict in every area of ministry. Everybody is driven by a common goal.

Proverbs 29:18 tells us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." That's why so many churches just limp along from week to week, really not thinking beyond Sunday. These churches tend to be what we call maintenance-oriented.

They are just maintaining things.

They don't know why they exist, so they devote themselves to preserving what they do have, which is basically a building and a budget that pays the staff — which had better keep things going or they will have to go get a real job.

Such staffs are usually desperate for a reason to exist. That's why they just jump on every bandwagon. They don't have any direction whatsoever, so they latch onto anything that might make people come to church. But all they're doing is trying to make it until next Sunday.

Then they say, "We made it. We had a good Sunday morning service. I hope we can hang in there until next week. So they're just maintaining. There is no vision at all. And so morale is zero. Nothing is more discouraging for people, than not to have a clear reason for their existence.

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They've been saved — or at least their theology makes them think they must be. They feel they have eternity taken care of and see little reason to worry about anybody else. They go to church because they are supposed to. Plus, they want to see what everybody is wearing this season.

You won't see major morale problems at Victory Outreach. Our vision makes our ministry powerful. Our vision is the driving force — making people want to turn their barber shops into fellowship centers.

Programs don't motivate, but vision does. Our people know their marching orders. We are here for a reason, and God has raised us up to accomplish it!

It is easy to get excited about that.

A vision also reduces frustration. Ever see frustrated congregations? *It can be horrible.*

Frustrated people are cranky all the time. They don't even have a smile. Isaiah 23:3 tells us that the Lord gives perfect peace to those who keep their vision firm and trust in Him.

Frustration is reduced because the vision not only defines what we're supposed to do, but it also defines what we don't do. Does our mission statement say anything about promoting a better worldwide understanding of petroleum geology?

No. So, I am not aware of raising up a single petroleum geologist.

Nor is Victory Outreach called to find Noah's Ark, although I know of some excellent ministries which have undertaken that goal. Victory Outreach is not called to bring unity between the Catholic, Evangelical and Pen-

tecostal churches, though we believe in unity. It is not our place to become policemen in neighborhoods where none will venture any longer. It's not our job to propose legislation resolving immigration conflicts.

Our vision just doesn't send us to any of these tasks — although I might feel led to give my personal support to a friend who does feel the call to solve some of these problems. But I have to be careful.

If you get involved in things that are not part of your vision, you'll find yourself spinning your wheels and wasting your time.

The bigger and more visible a ministry becomes, the more people are going to come with their agendas. They will want you to get involved with this movement or that cause.

It is not uncommon for people to want us to join a worthwhile project, and then want us to promote it. Unless we are clear as to the vision of our church, the temptation may draw us off-track.

The enemy has a way of diverting us, getting us involved in so many things that we are unable to accomplish anything. Paul said in Philippians 1:28 that he wanted to see the church standing firm with one common vision.

James chapter 1:8 tells us that the life of a man with divided loyalty will reveal instability in every turn.. But a clearly defined vision makes decisions easy. You simply ask, "What will this program do to help fulfill our vision?"

A mission statement gives us a focal point, and a point of reference. It allows us to concentrate on the job

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ahead. Philippians 3:13 shows Paul declaring basically, “I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing, forgetting what is behind, and looking forward to what lies ahead.”

He said he was putting all his energy into the vision God had given him and into the purposes of God for his life.”

Paul said there was one thing he would do. He said he was not going to do a lot of other things, but he was going to do one thing and dedicate his life to it.

He became a specialist.

He became a ministry specialist in his field of spreading the Gospel as a missionary and equipping the saints in the churches that he left behind.

That focus made him very, very powerful. When you have a vision, it helps you to be effective.

I want you to know that there is a difference between effectiveness and efficiency. I know a lot of churches that are efficient, but they’re not effective.

Efficiency is doing something correctly. Effectiveness is doing the right thing correctly.

You can be doing things right, going through a program, looking like efficient, well-oiled machinery. There are churches like that, looking like well-oiled machines. But it is all superficial. They are not accomplishing anything.

On the other hand, our guys are effective because they know where they are going and know what they are shooting for.

They have a vision.

The church that forgets its ultimate purpose — its

vision — becomes a slave to the immediate.

Instead of working on the big picture, you spend all your time dabbling with trivial stuff. You become a slave to every penny-ante thing that comes your way. Why?

Because you are easily side-tracked. You have forgotten about the ultimate goal before us — the vision. You get caught up in details that don't amount to anything.

One of the reasons that America lost the Vietnam War, some say, is that the President of the United States had no overall vision for the war. As a result, our generals had no direction. The commanding officers in the field had no real objectives. The war became an exercise in frustration with the Vietcong hitting us here, there and everywhere — and we had no idea what to do.

We were like a big, lumbering element under attack by pygmies with pea-shooters. They really couldn't defeat the elephant, but they sure could make him uncomfortable — and cause him to run away.

President Lyndon Johnson became bogged down in the smallest details of the war. It finally got where he had to choose the daily B-52 bombing targets in North Vietnam.

That was ridiculous.

He was the President of the United States. He should not have been bothered with such detail. He was guilty of what is called "micro-management" when he should have been formulating an overall policy — such as coming up with a vision for why we were there.

If you don't clarify what the vision is, you are going to waste energy in trivial matters. With a vision, you can

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concentrate on the job before you. Without a vision, you will be distracted by the details and the day-to-day crises.

A fourth part of a vision-driven ministry is cooperation. People are more eager to get on board when they know the destination.

I'm so glad that I'm in a ministry in which we all know where we're going.

When a ministry doesn't know, its people go hither and thither, battered by every wind of new doctrine, abused by every seductive fad. They jump, they change, they dither and they argue among themselves.

At midstream, in the middle of the road, they abandon their efforts, for example, to establish a Christian high school and instead are seen assigning members to mandatory discipleship "households." Then you hear that the households have been disbanded and the church is establishing a civic ballet and orchestra.

The result is confusion, dissension and revolt — not to mention church members' reluctance to get involved. Who wants to pour energy into a project likely to be canceled on the whim of their feeble leadership?

A church with no vision jumps onto whatever bandwagon is popular and leaps into whatever fad that is in vogue. The leaders jump, and then the congregation follows. Sometimes the congregation leads and the leaders trot along behind. Nobody knows where they are going, so any destination will do.

I like to know where I am going. People want to know why we are here, why we are doing what we're doing, and what we're trying to accomplish.

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That's why folks don't want to go into a music ministry or a singles ministry or a visitation ministry if it has a reputation for disorganization, confusion, ineffective training, indecisive leadership and a lack of vision.

Chapter 11

Communicate the vision

Some time ago, I had to explain to a large conference a vision that I believed the Lord had laid on my heart. It was an urgent vision about financial integrity.

I had an important burden to share with these people — about 3,000 of them seated under an enormous tent. As soon as I got onto the platform, the sound system went out.

“Oh, Lord,” I prayed, “please put on the sound system. Please Lord, I’ve got this vision and I’ve got to communicate today.”

Meanwhile, the electricians and the sound crew and several volunteers from the crowd were working on it, but the sound still didn’t work. About an hour passed and everybody was being as patient as could be expected. I said, “I’m going to do it anyhow. I’m going to get up

there. If I have to shout it, I'll shout it out, but I'm going to get this message out." Then, I said, "Devil, you're not going to have the victory in this thing."

So I got up and held up the microphone, but it still wasn't working. So, I said, "Well, I'll just go ahead and I'll shout it out." And I tried.

However, yelling to 3,000 people is easier said than done.

"I want your attention," I yelled at them. I've got a message that I've got to preach to you. Turn in your Bibles ..."

But hardly anybody could hear me.

Then one of our security guys comes up with a bullhorn that we use to preach on the streets. I got to fooling with it, and I said, "It's going to be like having a street rally."

And I started preaching with the bullhorn. However, a lot of people still couldn't hear. So, I was praying again when all of a sudden the sound system came on.

And I was back in business.

I tell you all this to make the point that if you do not communicate the vision, then who will know anything about it?

You have to be persistent in communicating the vision, because the devil is afraid of a church with a vision; he will try to inhibit your ability to communicate it to your people.

And you had better stay in communication with the Lord. He is the author of your vision. In case it changes, you had better stay in touch. Furthermore, He will give you the grace and the ability to communicate to your

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people what you need them to know.

The pastor is the keeper of the vision. As the leader of Victory Outreach, I am the keeper of the vision. I must be responsible to be able to communicate it.

Furthermore, the ministry will never outgrow the vision of the pastor. The pastor needs continually to be clarifying and communicating the vision of the church.

Additionally it is very important to apply the vision. How? Programs within your church should be driven by the vision. Ask yourself, why do I have that program? Does that program coincide with what ultimately we want to do?

So you program by vision. You structure by vision. In fact, your whole church should be fashioned according to the vision that God has given.

Now, let me mention one more element of having a vision that will assist in evaluating your progress. In II Corinthians 13:5, the Bible tells us to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith. It says, "And test yourself."

We need constantly to be evaluating ourselves. We're to judge ourselves. If we don't, somebody else will.

But you can't evaluate your progress if you don't know what you were supposed to be doing. A vision gives you a standard by which to gauge how you did and where you're going.

If you don't have an idea of where you are headed, how will you know if you ever got there? Likewise, if you do not know what you're supposed to be doing, then how will you determine whether you did it?

A friend of mine visited a church where nobody

seemed to know where they were going.

First, he was left out in the glassed-in lobby for more than a half hour. The receptionist was patronizing and kept asking him questions which made him wonder if the ministry was afraid it was under some kind of investigation by somebody.

Most of the staff that hurried through the lobby looked baffled and overworked. Quite a few were dressed so similarly that it took my friend a while to realize that there was a great deal of faded polyester and 20-year-old double-knit here. The hair styles matched. The too-big lobby had a dusty, out-of-date look — with plastic plants sagging against the walls and a large triangular area where the floor tiles had been pulled up and bare concrete showed.

The elderly pastor came through with five young men in sharp suits and two secretaries lugging piles of manila folders. As he paused and checked his hair in a wall mirror, he raged his irritation with his absent son, who was the broadcast ministries director and had gone behind his back to fire the manager of the church-owned radio station.

My friend had already heard about the station, an out-of-date AM facility recently fined \$25,000 by the Federal Communications Commission for not having an adequate fence around its transmitter.

With the five suits and the two clutching their manila folders, my friend was ushered through three doors with security buzzers, back to the pastor's study. It was spacious and elegant, but a little out-of-date, like everything else.

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One entire wall was an enormous, black-and-chrome audio and video system, which had a reel-to-reel player/recorder going. It made my friend nervous as it was either playing music turned down inaudibly or else was picking up and recording everything said in the office.

The opposite wall to the right of the pastor's enormous, black-ebony and mother-of-pearl-inlay Chinese-style desk was filled with a billboard-size, faded mural of the pastor helping unload a helicopter in what appeared to be Ethiopia or Somalia. Behind the desk was a full-length mirror in which the pastor checked himself and adjusted his hair frequently.

Sitting against the mural in an antique church pew, 12 sixth graders from the ministry's private school were expecting to perform a skit for the pastor for their speech class. They were unceremoniously shuffled off to somebody else while he put on a little more hairspray, re-checked his suit in the mirror and talked on his speakerphone with his apparently confused wife, who among other things was extremely upset that the church's MasterCard had been declined at her dress shop.

Meanwhile a woman with no makeup and an elaborate Pentecostal hairdo piled atop her head came in and began giving orders to the two secretaries and the men in suits. She seemed huffy, saying they were supposed to be helping her pack up to go on vacation and that nobody had been assigned to take care of her duties.

A graphic artist came in and placed a magazine cover in front of the pastor, who ignored it and took a call on the speakerphone from a friend vacationing in Quebec. The artist stood back out of the way and quietly began

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talking with my friend. He was also in charge of the church's bookstore, its cassette tape ministry, and its senior citizens "meals on wheels" outreach.

The pastor got off the phone, rejected the artwork, sent all but one of the young men in suits away, then volunteered to my friend that he personally disliked the young graphic artist, but that he was letting him "sink or swim" since he was the son-in-law of a major contributor.

My friend began his interview and asked the pastor what he considered the vision of the church to be.

The pastor got another phone call — this time from a book wholesaler in Singapore who was excited but harried about getting ready for a big crusade there — and so my friend directed the vision question to the remaining young suit, who was in charge of nationwide home fellowship groups, staff training and getting permits for Canadian television, which he said was turning out to be completely impossible.

But what, asked my friend, was the vision of the ministry? Picking at his fingernails, the young man glanced at the elderly pastor, then smiled without answering and began telling of his own conversion at age 11 and how he had been the son of an alcoholic Catholic dad who abused his Presbyterian mother. He told how he had been bitterly unhappy as a Methodist missionary to Chile after six years of college and seminary, but had heard this ministry was searching for somebody very young with a master's degree.

Rumor was that the pastor's children were going to be passed over in taking the reins when he died.

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So, he had applied — and had impressed the pastor with his fluent Spanish and *magna cum laude* diploma. A board of directors member had tipped him off out in the lobby that the pastor's wife wanted to initiate a new outreach to the Hispanic community.

However, nothing had come of that yet.

The elderly pastor then got off the phone and, after pausing at the mirror, showed my friend numerous autographed photos on the wall of himself in a news conference with the governors of Montana and Georgia, another of him shaking hands with Michael Jordan, and a third of him and his daughter, wearing far too much makeup, standing with Beverly Sills, Barbara Bush and Space Shuttle astronauts. The piece-de-resistance showed the pastor posing beside Pope John Paul I, the one who had died after only a month heading the Vatican.

The pastor said the ministry was growing phenomenally — that a new children's TV show on a public access cable channel apparently wasn't being watched by anybody but the kids' parents. However the equipment had been provided by a donor for the project and they were going to use the gear to update two studios at their local TV station.

My friend tried to reintroduce his question about the vision of the ministry, but was sent to lunch with the ministries administrator. When posed with this question he thought about it for a long time and said his vision for the church was bringing about God's manifest presence through creative visualization.

My friend was then turned over to the crusade music minister, who confided that he was hoping to join an in-

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ner city ministry such as Victory Outreach — which he respected *immensely* — and did my friend know if Sonny Arguinzoni had any openings for people who had never been wacked out on drugs?

Speaking of drugs, had my friend heard that the pastor had just fired the church's minister of rehabilitation? He had been operating some sort of 12-step plan for adult children of church members. It was very hush-hush, but the rehab minister had been busted over the weekend for cocaine possession. The staffer seemed delighted and apparently was secretly hoping it would hit the news media.

Well, I don't have to tell you that I know this ministry is headed for problems. The only person that I'd have much time for is that fired, busted rehab minister.

At least he had hit bottom and was probably looking for answers.

Everybody at that church had their own goals, personal ambitions and private agendas. There was no vision. Morale was rock-bottom. There seemed to be very little communication.

There seemed to be no values.

Nobody was cooperating.

Nobody was working together toward a common purpose. And there appeared to be only haphazard ministry taking place — only enough to keep the contributions coming in.

It was a mess.

That's what happens when nobody can communicate the vision.

Or even remember it.

Chapter 12

Internalizing the vision

A police officer we will call Bill Pittura is cruising an area of town he has patrolled since he joined the L.A. Police Department in 1992. The area is a portrait of the new America.

The people who live there speak 54 primary languages and dialects. Hispanics, blacks, Caucasians, Vietnamese, Filipinos, Laotians, Koreans and Cambodians all live within a few blocks of each other.

Each group has its own gang problems. A dispatcher calls his number and Pittura picks up the microphone on his dash. He is told to investigate a possible gang-related drive-by shooting.

“See how busy it is out here? We’re not even in the bad part yet,” Pittura says. Like any good cop, he is an adrenaline addict. He likes to be where the action is.

Here the face of juvenile crime is non-violent and male, although girls are coming into the system by increasing numbers.

The majority of kids who show up in court are growing up without any male authority figure. Their role models come from the mean streets. Bad boys command respect in this neighborhood. Rap sheets are their resumes. These kids look up to wild and raging basketball star Charles Barkley. They yawn at the mild-mannered Michael Jordan.

They see glamour in the bad life. Getting arrested or held overnight is a rite of passage. Their peers respect them more when they get out. "Scare 'em straight" programs are increasingly viewed as counterproductive because it plays into their budding street-tough self-image.

"These kids know a lot about pain. As many as 90 percent of those getting into trouble have been neglected or abused sexually and/or physically," says Officer Pittura.

Their needs aren't often met in the juvenile justice system. How can a government program which is barred from mentioning Jesus and scared of teaching any kind of values change a scarred, scared kid who's been a failure for 15 years and turn him around in 30 days?

"It can't," says Pittura. "These kids need Jesus."

"There are very few jobs you enjoy going to every day," says the officer as he aims his patrol car down a particularly notorious street — which he admits he would think twice about entering after dark.

"I never get tired of coming out here." He pulls up in front of a flimsy-looking two-story apartment complex.

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The street is a graveyard for dead cars, mostly gas hogs from the 1970's. He pulls into a deserted parking lot behind a hamburger stand to scan for license tags on the daily "hot sheet," which gives street cops the tags, names and descriptions of criminals believed to be operating in their area. Officer Pittura copies down the makes and plates of several cars on a piece of paper. He puts it on a clipboard on the dash.

Pittura pulls into a darkened gas station next to a liquor store and cuts his lights. He digs out a pair of binoculars and trains them on a battered low-rider, an Army tank of a car with adjustable air shocks that hoist the body up and down, usually at intersections to attract girls or impress rivals. Four young men run out of the store. One chucks a case of malt liquor into the back seat and off they cruise. Pittura stops them a block away.

He approaches the car cautiously, his flashlight in one hand, the other covering his revolver. He has the four youths get, out one at a time, then makes them line up in front of the squad car with their hands on the hood, where he can see them in the flashing blue-and-red light.

"When was the last time you were in trouble?" Pittura asks each kid.

"This ain't nothin' new, officer, I already done time," the biggest kid says, flipping an identity card across the hood. He is not even old enough to drive, but he has a prison tattoo on his right shoulder, the tough-guy equivalent of a Lacoste alligator.

"You want me to say, 'Good for you?'" Pittura snaps. The kid's eyes narrow, but he keeps staring ahead.

His friends give Pittura answers like "I got assault

charges pending,” and “I’m on probation for possession.”

One of the boys is at least two years younger than the others and looks scared. He does not belong with them. These kids are well on their way to living a life where the walls are concrete and the windows have steel bars. He, on the other hand, has not made the turn.

Pittura makes the scared one stand beside his patrol car. The officer issues the driver two tickets, one for driving without a license, one for being a minor in possession of alcohol.

He confiscates the malt liquor and makes sure that a kid with a driver’s license gets behind the wheel.

“Hey officer, how about a beer?” the kid with the tattoo wisecracks as he climbs into the back seat.

“Good night, gentlemen,” Pittura says, ignoring the punk. “Drive safely.”

He turns back to the scared kid, who is trembling. Pittura takes a business card out of his shirt pocket. “I help teach kick-boxing over at the gym next to the Korean grocery,” he says. “You could be really good.”

The kid takes the card, his eyes wide. It has Pittura’s home phone number as well as a 24-hour number at a Victory Outreach rehab house.

“I been to Victory,” whispers the kid, his voice trembling nervously. “Them dudes in the car are my cousins. I have to live with them now.”

“Well,” says Pittura, “you give me a call anytime. I don’t want you jammin’ with them.”

The boy grins nervously.

“OK,” says Pittura. “You can go.”

The kid walks nervously to the car, leans in the win-

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dow. He says something and the driver guns the engine. Then, he turns and strolls off down the sidewalk. The car pulls away without him.

"I try to treat people as human beings," Pittura says. He checks in with the dispatcher, then drives away.

"I was a probation officer," he says. "I covered a district that, in squalor and human depravity, rivals Calcutta. If you're a teen-ager, home is no place to be when your abusive father is watching the soaps because he can't find a job and your mother is screaming at step-kids who are forever crawling all over you. The streets offer more privacy than some teen-agers have at home and a lot more excitement.

"Drugs are the No. 1 problem, though. Drugs are readily available, and there's a lot of pressure on kids to take them. It's tough to say no when you're bored and your friends are laughing and getting high and asking, 'Are you chicken?'"

Drugs can range from marijuana — straight or laced with opium or PCP, an animal tranquilizer that induces a state of temporary insanity — to Asian heroin or Bolivian cocaine.

The most violent people on the street without exception are PCP users. The drug seems to give users superhuman strength while at the same time it anesthetizes them so they feel no pain. Every cop Pittura works with has a favorite story about some incredible feat performed by somebody who was high on PCP.

One was attacked by a man high on PCP one night. Wilson hit him in the kneecap with his night stick and broke the knee, but the guy didn't feel a thing and kept

coming after Wilson. It can also cause the user to freeze like some kind of deranged statue. "I was on duty one night when officer called for back-up," says Pittura. "I was close by and when I arrived, in my headlights, here is this black dude performing what looked like slow-motion kung fu."

Suddenly he froze with his arms stretched out behind him like a butterfly swimmer about to dive into a pool. Pittura got out and talked with the other officer. They decided who was going to take what arm.

"Then we rushed him and got him handcuffed. He did not resist. You just never can tell. I've had them freeze, then suddenly turn violent so fast, you wouldn't believe it."

The rest of the evening is uneventful for Officer Pittura.

"The job is basically mundane and repetitious," he says. "The events in a one-hour cop TV show take a lifetime to happen to a real-life cop. I've only been in three hot chases in 10 years. I stay because I like helping people who will accept help. Maybe I helped the kid tonight. I am going to be praying for him."

Officer Pittura has caught the vision.

We need thousands more like him.

He lives out the vision differently than others — but his job is considerably different than that of the MacArthur Park barber. He is not free to preach on duty.

But his ministry is just as valid — even if the only person he ever helps is that kid who got out of the car and walked off without his trouble-making cousins.

Officer Pittura's ministry exalts Jesus just as effec-

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tively as one of our enthusiastic street preachers outside of a South Central liquor store. Both have the vision.

Let me break it down for you. There are several important parts of the vision that God has given to us.

The first is that we must exalt Jesus. We want to glorify His Name. That is at the top of the list. The Scriptures tell us that “if He be lifted up,” all men will be drawn to Him. So, it is important that in everything, He gets the glory. Otherwise we get into the personality cult business we discussed earlier. Then if the personality figure stumbles, all the hard work is destroyed.

However, Jesus never fails.

He never lets anybody down.

Another essential area is to share the vision through evangelism. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28. He said, “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations.” He wasn’t just talking about quick converts; no, He was talking about making disciples.

In Mark 16, He told them “Go ye into all the world, preaching the Gospel to every creature.” He was giving them the vision.

Acts 1:8 further instructs, “But ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the world.” *He was imparting the vision to them.*

He gave them a worldwide vision. It was a task that could be done by man — but only through God. He told them the world is ours. He told this seemingly insignificant group of disciples, “I’m giving you the task of reaching the world. You’re going to be witnesses first here in

Jerusalem, then out in Judea, then up in Samaria , and then into the farthest corners of the world.”

That vision has been handed down now for 2,000 years; from Jesus to His disciples, then from the disciples to the members of the new churches that began springing up after the day of Pentecost, then onto their children and grandchildren and so on through the centuries until it has been passed on to us today.

Peter and Paul were driven by the vision. Once when the Apostle Paul was taken in chains before a non-believing king, he was asked why he persisted in preaching, particularly when it got him in such trouble.

Paul said he could not disobey the vision given to him by God. “King Agrippa, I cannot be disobedient to the heavenly vision,” he said, “I can’t do anything else but be faithful to the vision that God has given unto me.”

Whenever God gives us a powerful vision such as the worldwide vision to the inner city that drives Victory Outreach, there is a tendency to feel very inadequate — to feel unable to accomplish it.

But whenever God gives us something to do, He gives us something beyond our abilities. I have found that He tends to give us things that take faith.

Everything God will give you to do will seem impossible unless you trust Him. He will not give you something which you can do by your own power and in your own ability.

In the Bible, every person that He called was given a God-sized task, a God-sized mission that took faith to accomplish.

The Bible says, “Without faith it is impossible to

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please God.” God has not called us to live mundane lives. He’s called us to live in the supernatural — and the tasks which He gives us require our dependence on His supernatural ability in order for us to accomplish them.

So if you feel inadequate, join the club. We all do. You know, if you don’t feel inadequate, then something is wrong with you. When you realize the magnitude of what He’s calling you to do, it should humble you.

You will not be the only one who privately asks, “God, are you sure you’re not making a mistake in calling *me* to tackle this important job?”

It’s natural to glance around and ask, “Lord, are you talking to *me*? Are you sure it’s me, or did I accidentally hear somebody else’s call? Maybe you got the wrong number Lord?”

And He patiently answers, “No I don’t have the wrong number. It’s you that I want. It’s you I’m calling to accomplish this mission. I’m going to empower you and enable you to do it”.

God has a way of making us capable to do what He calls us to do. And He gives us the ability and the wisdom to enlist help when we need it.

Remember the story of Gideon in the Bible. God’s people “did evil in the sight of the Lord,” so He delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years according to Judges 6:1.

Midian was not just an invading army. The entire Midian nation apparently moved in and brought all their in-laws with them. Judges 6:5 says “they came as grasshoppers” and “they and their camels were without number.”

The next verse says “Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.”

Aha! That was exactly what God wanted. He desired for His chosen people to turn back to Him. He wanted them to realize that they were unable to cope with this problem without their loving Creator and Almighty Father.

Instead of protecting them as usual from their enemies, He had withheld His supernatural hand and let the Midianites move in like a plague of locusts. They crowded the children of Israel off their own land until the Israelites were hiding in caves. There, they finally hit bottom and cried out to the Lord to rescue them.

So, He sent Gideon to end the terrible famine caused by the Midianites’ smothering presence. He gave Gideon a humanly impossible vision.

He also empowered him to gather an army of 32,000 — no easy task when the whole countryside was crammed with enemy Midianites. But the Israelite people caught Gideon’s vision, too. An army gathered.

Then God put them all to an incredible test. The Lord told Gideon that he had gathered too many soldiers. Now, bear in mind that perhaps a quarter million Midianites were occupying Israel. The tiny Israelite resistance army of 32,000 was not one fifth their size.

But God explained to Gideon that if He let Israel go ahead into battle against the Midianites, the Israelites might “vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.” The Lord didn’t want the Israelites taking credit for their own rescue. He wanted them to

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see beyond the shadow of a doubt that He had fought and won their war for them.

So, God told Gideon to tell his army that "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return" home. Well, 22,000 packed up and left, leaving Gideon with 10,000.

Consider the morale of those who remained. Here you have 10,000 soldiers who are trying to be faithful, but cannot figure out what their respected leader thinking. Apparently, he cannot even make up his own mind as to whether he is going to have an army or not.

After mobilizing his people to war, now he has allowed two thirds of those who came to fight leave! It made no sense.

However, these kind of morale problems did not plague Gideon.

He had a vision.

His people shared it.

And the Lord was with them.

Even so, God told Gideon that he still had too large an army. He was instructed to bring the 10,000 who remained to a brook to get a drink. He was to identify those who kept an eye out for the enemy and who only put one hand down into the water and sipped the water out of their hand.

What about the rest who jumped in, fell in, were tossed in, stuck their heads in, or otherwise ignored the possibility of danger?

They were sent home.

Apparently, 9,700 had a splashing good time.

Gideon was left with 300.

Now consider the impossibility of Gideon's vision.

He was told to raise an army. He did it. Then he was told to send them home.

He did.

Then, he was supposed to take on an army as mighty as any that had fought in World War II's largest battles — and he was told to do it with 300 guys whose only qualification was that they didn't like getting wet.

How do you suppose he was going to explain this to the 300? I don't know about you, but if I was in an army that had been reduced to fewer people than live in most Los Angeles blocks, I would not be real excited about attacking an enemy greater than all the forces America sent against Iraq in the Persian Gulf War.

Yet, Gideon was faithful. And notice that he had no deserters. The Lord gave him 300 who caught his vision, stuck by him regardless of how foolish they all looked, and were willing to do whatever God told Gideon to do.

You know the rest of the story.

In the night, God led the 300 down to the Midianites' encampment. The 300 encircled the camp and woke everybody out of a sound sleep, creating total panic by blowing 300 trumpets, breaking 300 water pitchers and waving 300 torches.

This is not exactly textbook battle procedure.

Yet, as they watched from safety, the Lord spread a wave of desperate panic throughout the Midianite camp. With a wave of His mighty hand, God "set every man's sword against his fellow," according to Judges 7:22. In the absolute chaos that followed, the Midianites turned on one another.

They killed each other.

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By morning, Israel was victorious — although they had stood back and watched God fight the battle. The Midianites who had not been killed in the midnight madness had fled in terror. They had “boogied for the border.”

God’s people were saved.

Because Gideon had enough faith to tackle an impossible vision and because he listened to God, he succeeded by doing things the Lord’s way.

Gideon was faithful to the vision. As a result he was empowered with the supernatural to do the absolutely absurd.

How did he communicate it to his people? Honestly and plainly. He just told them what God told him to do.

He didn’t hire a public relations “spin doctor” to advise him on the propaganda necessities of his message. He didn’t talk with military psychologists on how to motivate the troops to engage in these unorthodox tactics.

He didn’t try to manipulate anybody by telling them half truths — or by working his troops into an emotional frenzy before they headed into battle.

No, He just told his people what God had said to do. They followed him to undertake the weirdest night time attack in the history of human warfare.

How should you communicate your vision? Honestly. Plainly. Spend a lot of time with the Lord beforehand and make sure you have received a genuine vision — and not just a nightmare from last night’s jalapeño, pineapple and anchovy pizza.

I know it is not always easy.

But Gideon managed — and so can you. Nobody is going to think you are any crazier than when Gideon told his 300 guys to take off their swords, leave their spears in their tents and bring to the Midianite camp a water pitcher, the ancient equivalent of a flashlight, and their kids' Boy Scout bugles.

So, do not feel alone when you have received your marching orders and you have to stand up in front of your congregation and tell them that God has told you to go preach to neo-Nazi street punkers in Amsterdam.

I had that call. I have shared that vision with a number of our leaders. As a result, Victory Outreach has sent several teams to the capital of the Netherlands — where we also minister to prostitutes in the famed red-light district and to satanists and to Dutch kids enslaved in Holland's legalized drug mess.

Now, tell me, does it make any sense for ex-jailbirds from some of the wildest neighborhoods on America's West Coast to turn their backs on the urgent needs of their hometown and, instead, try to solve the problems of the Dutch?

What about our former gang members who have felt that urgent call of the Lord to rescue the abandoned orphans of Brazil? I have heard that call, too. I have shared that vision.

No, it does not make any sense in the natural way of looking at things. A real case can be made for every one of us staying home and trying to solve the problems in Los Angeles.

But the Lord has sent us out.
To England.

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To Asia.

To the big cities of South America, including Brazil where they don't speak English or Spanish! My friends, we have to learn Portuguese if we are going to accomplish anything in Brazil.

So, why doesn't the Lord give the vision for Brazil to some lucky Brazilian?

I don't know.

I am not God.

He is.

I just have to do what He says.

And I have to trust God that the vision He has sent us will overflow into the people in our churches. Now, there is a miracle for you.

If tomorrow the Lord shows me that we are to take the inner cities of China, I must somehow obey and trust Him to overflow that vision into the hearts of some of you — so we can all head to Beijing and Shanghai and Hong Kong and get to work!

Incidentally, the Lord has not yet told me to rush to China. But He has sent us to Washington, D.C., which is just about as foreign to our L.A. street kids who grew up in Hollywood's back yard.

He has sent our ex-dopers and gang leaders and streetwalkers to establish effective outreaches in Denver, Hawaii, Chicago, Baltimore, Detroit, Albuquerque, Philadelphia, Seattle and Las Vegas. Yes, we have established strong Victory Outreaches there along with rehab homes.

We are in Culiacan, Hemosillo, Mazatlan, Nogales, Tijuana and Zacatecas, Mexico. We are in Barcelona,

Spain, Madras, India, and Santiago, Chile.

As I write this, we can count over 200 locations worldwide where Victory Outreach-sponsored works are underway.

A vision such as this cannot be singularly driven. It cannot be seen by just one person. It must be collectively driven. United we stand, divided we fall.

Do you remember the firefighters in the movie *Backdraft*? One of them was dangling over the burning brink of death, held only by his partner's strong hand.

"Let me go," he whispers, concerned that they both will be pulled into the flames.

"You go, we go," answers the other fireman. *If you fall, then I fall, too. So, I am not going to let you fall.*

And he didn't.

In just the same way, the vision must overflow into the church, into the people. Sometimes that's a problem. You have to reveal the vision to your people. They have to be exposed to it. Gideon had to tell God's people that he had been chosen to lead them into battle against the Midianites.

When you expose your vision to your congregation through your preaching, your teaching, and your conversation, it will spill out in every word that you speak.

People will catch your enthusiasm.

It will be infectious.

They will want to be part of it.

Now, after you expose them to it, involve them in it. Allow them to participate in the vision. Get them up to their elbows in it.

How?

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One way is the ministry of the clipboard. In church, pass around a clipboard and ask people to sign up to help. When they volunteer, give them a job.

Another extremely important way is to ask them to pray. I am always asking my congregation to pray for world evangelism. When people get involved in praying for world evangelism, they begin to see the importance of the task before us.

Ask them to give. Ask them to donate with what God has blessed them. That can be money or it can be left-over Sunday school materials or used clothing.

I know of a woman in a large city in the Philippines whose ministry is to the people at the garbage dump. She has devoted her life to the landfill.

She gives away used clothing to the 20,000 or so people who live in the dump. I am not exaggerating. That many people actually live there in squalor, filth and despair.

Every time a garbage truck pulls in, they swarm over it, digging into the putrid refuse for something they can eat or sell. Yes, a lot of stuff is being recycled, however, the human toll is terrible. A garbage dump is not a place to raise children. Garbage dumps are breeding places for disease.

But this missionary has gotten a lot of people involved in helping her. From all over, they send her truckloads of discarded clothing. They send old shoes and pants and shirts and belts and bib overalls.

She gives it all away while she preaches to the dump dwellers about Jesus' love. As she does, it is as if the former owners of those discarded clothes are right there

with her teaching about Christ's forgiveness and saving grace.

Her audience from the dump shows up for the clothes, not the sermon. But they put up with the sermon if that is what it takes to get the clothes. And even in the hardest soil, the right seed will take root. She prays fervently that God will give her the right word to plant in the hard hearts of the dump dwellers.

And she prays fervently for you and me to send her our old disco jackets and our Beatle boots and our Hawaiian wedding shirts so that souls will be saved.

Months after the clothing drive, when you receive reports of the phenomenal things happening in the dump, you can identify with the mission.

After all, the elderly man in the photos is wearing that double-knit leisure suit you bought for your sister's wedding.

And there he is, being water baptized in an irrigation ditch — after 40 years as a thief.

You feel responsible, and rightly so because you helped make it happen.

And you feel really good about it. You are identifying with her ministry, although it is thousands of miles away and you have never been to this particular Philippine dump.

That is so important — helping people identify with the vision. You want them to be plugged into it. You want them to believe in it. You want them to feel ownership. You want them to be partners with you in the ministry, sharing with you the vision God wants done.

And you certainly want people to internalize the vi-

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sion — to let it become part of them. When they do, it's not just the pastor's vision anymore, nor the rehab director's vision. It's theirs. They feel within them a driving sense of urgency and a sense of destiny. The vision begins to consume them.

It becomes contagious. Why? Because it's not just me preaching from a pulpit that somebody ought to go do something. Instead, it's coming from their hearts. It has become their vision.

Think about the MacArthur Park barber. He is not witnessing to his customers because every Sunday I tell him he'd better keep it up or else he will burn in Hades. No! He is driven by a vision planted deep within his heart. He desperately longs for the salvation of pimps and perverts and pornography addicts — as well as housewives, businessmen and retired postal workers.

What about Officer Pittura? Is he just going along with what the preacher said? Absolutely not. Neither are the kick-boxers in the gyms of the rich and famous. They have a heart for Los Angeles' murderous kids.

When the vision is internalized, you find yourself with a group of people who are just as excited about the vision as you are. When they speak, they're speaking vision. When they breathe, they are breathing vision. When they go jogging in the park, they are bubbling over with the vision — and they share it with others.

That's how you bring about a world explosion.

Let me caution you, however. When we talk about vision, there are some people who may catch a revelation right away, and want to run with it. So, here is a warning.

First of all, individual vision must always be submitted to the leadership of your church. Whatever vision you have, it had better be in harmony with the vision God has given your leaders.

If it isn't in accordance with the vision of the pastor, and the vision of the church, then it is not a God-sent vision. It may be a divisive vision from the pits of hell. Those types of vision bring discord, dissent and death.

So, any vision that God has given to you must be submitted to the plan God has for that particular ministry. Your vision needs to be submitted to the leadership of your congregation.

Another word of caution is that we cannot become so dogmatic, so gung-ho with our vision, that not only do we fail to communicate it, but we actually turn people off — and we run them off as well.

As a pastor, you've got to understand your sheep. God has called us to be shepherds, nurturing and loving His people, not defeating them with a message of guilt that they have not won their neighborhood to Christ yet.

We have to be patient. I have yet to meet a perfect Christian. If God sends him to me, I wonder if he will be able to stand me since I am so far from perfect.

The only perfect Christian is Christ. Praise God, He can stand me. He is patient with me. He puts up with my faults and my quirks and all the flaws that my wife is gracious enough not to list for me.

And if I am to minister by His example, I cannot run people off just because they have not yet grabbed hold of the vision. God has not called us to be intolerant.

It is an easy thing to lose patience with somebody

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who just cannot get their act together. It is not difficult at all to get in their face and yell, "I don't have time to spend with you anymore, man. You are a waste of space! Get out of my face and get out of this church. You are an obstructionist, arguing about every ignorant thing that occurs to you and you have a religious spirit, you know? So, get out of here right now and take your ugly girlfriend with you!"

That is not effective ministry.

No, we've got to be thankful for the people God sends to us. We have to find what makes them an undiscovered treasure in the darkness. These are God's precious people, His sheep that He has entrusted to our care. God brings them to us and we've got to be very, very careful, to take time with them, and to be patient with them.

Now, if they become real obstructionists, then you've got to deal with that. But remember to hate the sin, not the sinner. Deal with the problem. Pray fervently about how the Lord would have you confront the problem effectively.

There will be times when you cannot understand why 100 percent of your people are not consumed with the vision. But you will find that some people just won't ever get it. They just want a church to come to because going to church is the right thing to do supposedly.

And you are going to have people who just will not make the level of commitment that is necessary to carry out the vision. They have to take care of all their worldly obligations — and that just doesn't leave time for religious stuff, which they figure is a preacher's job anyway.

Many times it's because they may have deep sin or many times there's a wound in them. Others have been burned — or who knows what. So it takes an act of God to shake them up. God is able to do that. So, be patient.

Wait for that act of God within their lives. Some of those people may never respond to an altar call. Although they need to lay everything before the Lord and submit to His call, they just sit in the back, and when the invitation hymn is over, they are out the door.

But they come back — and so we've got another shot at them.

I can think of a woman at La Puente — which I know some people think is the world's perfect church. Well, it happens to be my favorite, but I would be wrong to say it is filled with completed works. No, it is filled with lives that are still under construction, just like any other church. This woman never made a single financial contribution to the church although she had the means and we certainly had the need.

I can think of times when she sat in a sermon on giving and got out her checkbook. With her fingers covered with diamond rings, she tap-tap-tapped on her little calculator. Apparently she was balancing her accounts — but she never wrote a single check.

I had to just pray that someday she would get plugged into the vision. I had to be patient and remember that she was one of God's children — and I was not supposed to run her off just because she was not giving like I thought she should.

We cannot covet. It is one of the Ten Commandments. Right up there with not killing and not cussing and not

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committing adultery, we are told not to covet. We must not wish that what someone else has could be ours instead.

So, up there in the pulpit as she balanced her checkbook, then as she put it away without writing a check, I had to be careful not to sin — and not to get resentful that she was not becoming generous. After all, the Lord provides all that we need.

I think Satan just put her there with her diamond rings and her tap-tap-tap to tempt me into becoming covetous and resentful. He was trying to tempt me to lust after her bucks.

Well, we were not going to fall or fail without that lady's money. My job was to impart God's vision to her so that she would begin listening to what the Lord wanted her to do.

Acts 1: 8 says, "Ye shall receive power," I needed to be praying that she would receive the power that Jesus promised to His disciples. He told them that "when the Holy Ghost is come upon you," they would be empowered as never before in human history.

And it's happened.

And it's still happening.

Without God's power, we could never rise to the task. God has called us to world evangelism. I am told there are still approximately 2.7 billion people out there who have never heard the Gospel even once.

As I write this to you, the world's booming population is estimated at five billion. So, more than half do not know about Jesus. They have not even had a chance to accept Him.

SONNY ARGUINZONI

So, we have an awesome task before us. Over one million people go into eternity every week without having Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. That is hard for me to bear! Satan is filling hell with them — and I should be doing something about it!

What a challenge we have before us!

We must be obedient to the heavenly call!

Chapter 13

The fields are ready for harvesters

Why do we do this?

Well, why did Jesus help the woman at the well? If you can understand His motivation, then you can understand the motivation of our people.

Maybe you can catch the vision, too.

Look at John 30, beginning with verse 4:

“Then they went out of the city, and came unto Him. In the meanwhile His disciples prayed Him saying, Master eat. But He said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Has any man brought Him anything to eat? And Jesus said unto them, My meat is to do the will

of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathered fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. Herein is the saying true, One soweth, another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor; other men labored, and you are entered into their labors."

Now, look at verse 39:

And many of the Samaritans of the city believed on Him for the saying of the woman which testified, He told me all that I ever did. And so when the Samaritans were come unto Him, they besought Him that He would tarry with them; and He abode there two days. And many more believed because of His own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Here again in the Word of God we find Jesus dealing with the Samaritan woman. When Jesus refers to reaching the world, the emphasis is not only reaching

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people on the other side of the world, but the emphasis is also on reaching our neighbor.

In this story, the emphasis is particularly dealing with difficult populations — such as seductive, evasive women living with their boyfriends, and people who come from backgrounds so totally different than yours that you are not comfortable talking about them to your mother.

The disciples were not excited about telling their wives, “Yeah, this week, we spent a lot of time with this adulterous woman over there in the city of people who have not worshiped in the Temple for several hundred years. You know, those folks you always taught me to despise since their ancestors compromised with the enemy’s pagan, occupying army.”

That means that if you dislike Iranians, then you had better prepare your heart before the Lord sends you to Iran — just like he sent Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh, whom he loathed.

What if the Lord empowered you with a mighty vision to win Iran for Jesus? Impossible, you say? That place is a stronghold of fanatical Shi’ite Muslim fundamentalists?

Wonderful! That means that they need to hear about Jesus. Maybe you will get to be a martyr! And an entire nation will turn to the Lord because you loved them enough to give your life for them!

Can you imagine what could happen if everybody who reads this book could get turned on as a soul winner? Could you imagine everybody who turned these pages becoming a soul winner and winning souls for Jesus Christ? I’ll tell you, there would be a worldwide, spiri-

tual awakening and a spiritual revolution that would make the Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution and Chairman Mao's Chinese Revolution and Nicolai Lenin's terrible Russian Revolution seem totally insignificant.

Why do I speak about vision? Why do I speak about winning souls, and taking the world and world evangelism?

First of all, because I believe it's a call that comes from within, as soon as a person comes to Christ. I believe at that very moment, God turns you into a soul winner — if you will let Him.

As soon as you receive Jesus Christ, the natural thing is for you to go out and tell somebody about it. The unnatural thing is for you to keep it to yourself.

This is precisely what happened with the Samaritan woman. Her life was totally transformed. Then, she went out and told the whole city,

They came to Jesus, too.

The Bible makes it clear that soul winning is natural for a Christian. If you are not a soul winner today, something is very, wrong with you. You're living an unnatural Christian life. The natural Christian life is the life of soul winning.

Now let me give you an example. When I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, I felt like that Samaritan woman. I could identify with her and how she felt. She had been living in darkness and bondage, but all of a sudden, she experienced the power of God in her life, and Jesus Christ totally set her free.

When it happened to me, I felt like I was going to explode. I was in a rehab home and they told me I was

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supposed to stay there for nine months or a year.

But I exclaimed, "I've got to tell somebody!"

That's how I felt!

I had to tell somebody. If I kept it inside of me, I was going to explode. The first person I told was my Mom. I went over my house and she was there. I went, "Mama, Mama, Mama, Mama, Mama! I got saved! Jesus Christ saved me." I hugged her. "Oh, I'm so happy, Mama. You just got to know that Jesus Christ has changed my life, He's answered your prayers and I'm so happy! I don't how to explain it, but He has changed my life. I feel so good!"

She wept with joy and began to rejoice with me. Then I went back to the rehab and I told them, "It's still not good enough, I've got to tell somebody else. I've got to tell others."

And then I got hold of my friend Nicky there at the rehab. He had come to the Lord before me and was already preaching. I said, "Nicky, man, I know a whole lot of people that were just like me."

And he said, "You do?"

"Yeah," I said. "I know a whole lot of hard-core drug addicts that you and I could go to, and I know the Word, but I'll go and I'll tell them what happened to me, and then you take it from there. Is that OK with you?"

"Yeah," he said enthusiastically. "Sonny, let's go." And off we went.

He got a microphone and I took him to my neighborhood in Brooklyn. I said, "OK Nicky, here's what I'll do. I'll take it first, and I'll start giving my testimony. They all know me, so they know who I was. That'll get

their attention — don't worry about it. And once I run out of gas, then I'll give it to you."

"OK," he agreed.

I got up there, and "Hey, everybody. Hey, you up there, on the fifth story, it's me, Sonny. I'm the guy that used to burglarize your apartments. I'm the guy that used to steal from you in the stores and hit you over the head, I'm that dope that used to shoot up on the roof tops over here in the neighborhood, it's me, it's Sonny."

Talk about getting their attention ... man! They all started coming out of their windows. In New York you've got these high-rise tenements where people live. Everything is very congested.

"It's me," I told them. "It's me over here. That's right, I'm over here, I'm the guy. Well, I want to tell you that Jesus Christ has changed my life and I'm not a drug addict no more. Jesus has set me free."

So, I went on and on and when I ran out of anything else to say, I said, "OK and here's Nicky Cruz."

Then Nicky, who was more experienced at street preaching by then, started making an altar call. He started saying, "You want Jesus Christ? You want what happened to Sonny? It could happen to you right now. You come right now! Come right now and accept Jesus as your personal savior."

And boy, they started coming, all these drug addicts and kids and people who didn't even really know me and people I'd grown up with and I started praying for them. They all asked, "Is it for real, man?"

"Yes, it's for real," I said. "Come on over here."

"Is it for real?" somebody else asked.

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“Yeah, and I want you to come right now. In fact, there’s this rehab where we could take you right now if you want to kick that habit. You can kick it right now.”

We loaded up the whole van.

We took them over to the house that Pastor David Wilkerson was using for a church. And that was the beginning of my ministry. Because of David Wilkerson and Nicky Cruz and the testimonies of the people they won to Jesus — like me — revival broke out there in Brooklyn, New York.

And I haven’t stopped since.

God gave us fruit.

Matthew 9:36-38 says about Jesus,

“But when He saw the multitude He was moved with compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into the harvest field.”

Today, we go out because the need is still there. You know people who are hurting. God has a way of opening our eyes to the need. Many times there are people who God brings across your path who are really hurting. The reason He brings them into your life is so that you can be a witness, so you can lead that person to Him.

When Jesus got hold of the Samaritan woman, He didn’t say, “Listen, go into a rehab home for two years,

then we will need to help you finish high school. After that, you will need four years of college, then two years of seminary so that you will have all your credentials and will be qualified to teach and counsel and conduct weddings.”

No! He just sent her right back to the city! There, that very same day, she told everybody what had happened to her! And they came to Jesus and He preached even more!

We need to be able to give as freely as we have received. As we see the need, we need to meet it Some of the best soul winners are new converts — people who have recently given their lives to Jesus Christ.

Soul winning is not a specialized gift imparted to only a few. Soul winning is a command! If you are not winning souls, then you’re being disobedient to God. Every person who gets saved is to become a soul winner for Jesus Christ.

Some people say, “I don’t know how to win souls. Teach me how to do it.” They want a classroom setting. They think I can give them a course to become experts, then they’ll be a soul winner.

Do you know how you learn to win souls? The same way that you learned to ride a bicycle. You learned to ride a bicycle by jumping on, then falling down and getting back on again.

And how did you learn how to walk? You watched everybody else from your crib. Then you started scooting on the floor and then crawling, then taking one step at a time while everybody cheered and acted like you had conquered the world.

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You learn to win souls by doing it. The more you begin to tell people about Jesus, the better you become at it. The more you try, the more effective you become.

Some people tell me, "We simply to live a Christian life before the people, and they see our Christian life, and they'll come to Christ."

Do you know what the Bible says? Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Romans 10:13 says,

"For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved, how then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe in Whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

We need more people to go out and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need you to listen to the call on your life. It's not only a call from above, but it's a call telling us to win souls, it's a call from below.

From below?

"Pastor Sonny," you are probably saying, "you've got to show me".

OK, in Luke 16:19, it says,

"There was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously everyday. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at the gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs

which fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angel into Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell."

Listen to what it says. In hell,

"He lifted up his eyes, and being in torment, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receiveth thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

"Then listen to what he said,

"I pray thee therefore father, that thou would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify unto them, lest they come into this place of tor-

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ment. And Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto them, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

You know what he actually told them? He said, "Listen, Lazarus can't go. If he were to come back from the dead and go witness to your family, they would ignore him just like they ignored Moses and the prophets. So, forget about Lazarus."

But there is a group of people that can go,

There is a group of people that the Lord has saved. He has set them free to go tell the world about Jesus.

So it's ours is a heavenly call, that at least in one passage of the Bible even came from someone being punished for all eternity in hell itself. He pleaded for somebody to go evangelize his brothers.

Hell is a reality. Think about your family members who are not saved. It's easier to let them alone and leave it up to them to get themselves saved. Listen, we need to feel the urgency that these people are headed for a horrible hell. We don't have a fixed time that they're going to be here on earth. They could step off the curb and get killed by a bus today.

The Bible says, "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment." The only opportunity we have to get saved is while we're alive and breathing. Only then can we accept Jesus Christ as our personal

Savior. I think we need a revelation of hell. If we could spend just one minute in hell, it would totally transform our lives. We would rush out into the streets and begin pleading with people to turn or burn!

When I was just a brand-new Christian and I was out witnessing, one of the guys that I witnessed to was one of my dear friends, a guy named Ray. I loved him very much, and he loved me very much. He was my best friend. We were bro's, buds, partners out there in the streets and had been ever since we were kids.

After I got saved, I went over and witnessed to him. He saw the change in my life, and he gave his heart to Jesus Christ. I was so happy. Seeing him grow up, I knew the tremendous potential that he had. So I said, "Man, if he keeps on following God, the Lord is going to use him in a powerful way."

Ray was smarter than I was. He was more talented than I would ever be. He had more personal charisma than I had. I believed that God could use him in a powerful way.

So I went off to Bible school. After my first year, I came back to Brooklyn and looked around the rehab and asked, "Where is Ray?"

They told me he'd backslid. He had gone back into the world. Man, when they told me that, it crushed me. I was looking forward to coming back and going out into the streets with him, you know — him and me teaming up and doing some powerful witnessing for Jesus.

I stayed at the rehab all summer and continuously prayed for Ray. Suddenly, the Lord spoke to me so clearly, and told me, "Sonny, I want you to get up from here. I

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want you to go through the neighborhood and I want you to find Ray. I want you to tell Ray that he needs to come back to Me, because this is his last opportunity. His time is up. It is urgent for him to come back and give his life to Me.”

Man, I am telling you, that shook me up. I got up from my knees and tore out of there to find Ray. I started asking everybody, “Have you seen Ray? Have you seen Ray? Have you seen Ray?”

“Well, he was here just a while ago,” they said, “but we don’t know where he is now.”

I found Ray hanging out with two other guys, totally stoned, under the influence of heroin. He didn’t have a shirt on and I could see his tracks, the needlemarks. And he was scratching them. So, I went up to him and in front of everybody, I started pleading with him, I said, “Ray, man, I’m so sad to see you like this. What happened to you?”

“Well, I was over there at the rehab,” mumbled Ray. “And I just got on a bummer and I left. I just got out of there, but I’ll be back one of these days.”

“Listen,” I told him, “you won’t have an opportunity ‘one of these days.’ You need to come back right now.”

“Oh no,” he said, “I’m not ready to go back.”

So, I laid it on him. “Ray, listen to me. Man, listen to me real good. This is your last opportunity. I was in the chapel praying for you, and God spoke to me and told me that your time is up. You need to come back to Jesus. This is your last opportunity, Ray, please listen to me.”

Do you know what he did? He looked at me and

said, "No, Sonny, just don't bug me man. Leave me alone."

One of his buddies tried to butt in, "Man, why don't you leave the guy alone."

"You shut up right now," I said. "I'm dealing with him. This is a matter of life and death. Ray, come back to God. He has sent me to tell you that this is your final opportunity."

He shrugged me off.

You know what I did? I humbled myself as I had never before in my life. I understand what Paul says about becoming a fool for Jesus. I began to beg Ray, right there in front of everybody. I mean, they were looking at me as if I was crazy.

I began to cry. I pleaded, "Please Ray, come on back. You need to come back to Jesus." With tears coming down my face, broken before my childhood best buddy, with all the compassion of the Holy Spirit within me, I begged him to listen.

"Ray, you've got to come back now. Please come back now." I grabbed his shoulders. "Ray, please come back now."

Do you know what he did?

He said, "Man, leave me alone. You're making a scene over here, man. You're making a fool out of yourself."

And he got up and he just walked away.

I stood there weeping and sobbing like a baby. Some of the guys were even looking at me weird, as if to say, "What is the problem with this guy?" So, with my heart totally broken, I walked back to the rehab.

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Two days later somebody found Ray in a hallway. He had overdosed and the guys he was shooting up with had rolled him. They beat him senseless while he was already overdosing and they took all the stuff he had.

And they left him to lie there in that hallway.

Ray was dead.

I remember the funeral. I was totally crushed.

“This is how the devil is,” my pastor David Wilkerson told me. “The devil comes to kill, to steal, and to destroy.”

At the funeral, those guys who rolled him and were high with him were no where to be seen. It was just me, David Wilkerson, and Nicky Cruz.

I still have a picture of Ray in the casket. I took a picture and I keep it with me. I look at it every once in a while to remind me of the mission God has given me.

I see his face, still messed up from the mugging that they gave him. One of the times when I looked at him, I said, “Why, why, why Ray? Why didn’t you listen? Why didn’t you listen to me, Ray? Why didn’t you listen?”

And all of a sudden it was like a voice coming to me. Don’t get me wrong. The Bible is very stern about trying to communicate with the dead. It is forbidden — and one reason is that Satan has very believable counterfeits who masquerade as our loved ones who have passed on.

But there is a place in the Bible where on the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples looked up and saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah.

So, while I am totally against violating all the Old and New Testament commandments about going to mediums or psychics who tell you they will contact your

dead friend or your mother, let me tell you what happened to me.

Maybe it was my imagination. Maybe it was the Lord.

But it was like the voice of someone who was in hell, crying out to me and saying, "Sonny, just keep on taking that message. Tell everybody, where you go! Tell everybody, so they won't have to come into this horrible place of torment. Just keep on telling them, keep on spreading that message. And don't stop spreading that message of the Gospel. Take it everywhere you go. Sonny, don't get comfortable, this is a horrible place, this is a horrible pit, just go and keep on taking the message and tell people of the love of Jesus Christ, so they won't have to come to this horrible place"

I trembled. And today, when I take out that picture of Ray dead in his coffin. I pull it out and I look at it and I see Ray's battered, puffy face and I can still hear those words, "Sonny, don't get comfortable, this is a horrible place. Keep on taking the message. Tell people of the love of Jesus Christ, so they won't have to come to this horrible place."

Have you been living the life of ease? Have you lost your compassion for souls? Are you doing things just mechanically?

Listen, we need compassion for our family members who are not saved, our children who are not saved, our parents who are not saved and our neighbors who are not saved. We need a burden. We need to go into a world that is full of darkness, and pain, and suffering. We have tell people and drag them out of the fire and show them the love of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 14

The call of God

Do you feel the call? A guy we will call Pablito believes he has. He remembers the morning he decided to change his life. He woke up in a jail cell for mental prisoners, covered with his own vomit. He was just 32.

When Pablito was 13, Satan eased up to him and said, “Dude, you and me are gonna have some fun.” Pablito’s father was a preacher. “That church comes first for your daddy.” Satan said, “You’re a looker, dude. You’re gonna get all kinds of girls to do all kinds of things. Your daddy won’t even notice — he’s all into that church.”

Pablito raised his dark eyebrows and smiled.

“He is never there for you,” Satan whispered. “He’s ashamed of you. Just look at how he wants you to dress. Listen to how he makes fun of your hair and talks about your friends. You don’t want to be anything like him. You want to be respected.”

So Pablito snuck around and started getting high with dudes at school who had always given him a hard time. They thought it was funny that he really could cuss and was so funny when he was smoking up. Pablito molded his rich, black hair into a street-smart style. He got his mother to buy him nothing but black, which he thought made his eyes flash and his teeth shine whiter.

His buddies were into guns, and breaking and entering. They really didn't steal that much.

They would go out to Irvine and the hills where rich people have houses they only use in the winter. When you're 13 years old, there's something profoundly exciting about blasting a .12 gauge at some rich woman's china cabinet or lining up Chivas Regal bottles on an antique piano and playing gunslinger with a Colt revolver.

One night when Pablito's parents thought he was on a Boy Scout camp-out, his buddies broke into a school under construction. The TV news said they set things back four months..

Then one night, Satan said to Pablito, "Boy, toke on this stuff. One hit and your head is gonna be like a pin-ball machine. Lights gonna flash, bells gonna ring. And the girls are gonna want to sit on your lap."

Pablito took a hit off a joint sprinkled with PCP. The world vanished, and where Pablito went he did not know, but he wanted to go again. And go again he did ... again and again.

He got a reputation for being a little crazy. He was a master at maintaining a front. You see, preacher's kids who have gone bad still have to look good or else everybody is always on their case — witnessing to them, hu-

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miliating them, praying publicly for their salvation.

Pablito thought it was funny to take a hit of LSD and go sing in the church choir. He saw the universe pass before his eyes and the staff turn into dancing zebras. As long as he kept a smile on his face and tattoos off his neck, everybody kept bragging about what a good boy he was.

Satan said to Pablito, "Hey Pablito, dude, chicks and guns and drugs are nice, but what you really want is cash. The streets, boy, it's in the streets. Make yourself some money! You know who wants to buy!"

So Pablito got himself connections and from age 14 to 16 made a little money dabbling in drug sales. He never did enough to threaten the really bad guys. They left him alone since he was more of a hobbyist than a businessman.

At age 16, Pablito got his own car and it was then that he really ran wild in the streets. The girls pretty much stood in line, and Pablito saw to them when he could make the time. He masterminded more burglaries than he can remember. He remembered the neighborhoods where he had seen good stuff. And he thrived on the rush that comes with life on the run. Cops and robbers in real life.

But Satan uses up his boys as fast as the NFL burns out running backs. By the time Pablito had dropped out of school at 17, his family was onto him. His father threatened to kick him out of the house. Pablito got sloppy and was even busted — twice. The third time, he was sentenced to electronic house arrest, which meant he had to stay with his parents, wearing an electronic gadget on

his ankle. It broadcast a signal to a box on his telephone. If he left the yard or even went across the street, there was a chance it would go off and automatically report him as violating his confinement. The cops watched every move he made and hassled him every time there was trouble on his block.

The days when Pablito could get a buzz on a single token were gone. The girls didn't look at him so much. He looked at them, but they looked away. To get high now, he had to go for stronger stuff. He resorted to inhalants he found around the house. As a result, he got a little "crispy." Some days, he had to pause and think before calling his sisters by their names.

"Hey, dude," Satan whispered. "These God losers, they failed you. Preachers are supposed to radiate divine love. Does your dad ever do that? It's just a job. People give him money so he doesn't have to really work. God is a scam, man."

Pablito would sit and brood. He remembered girls who would stop him in school to say, "You've got the most wonderful dad! My family's been having some problems and he's been counseling us and things are so much better!" What a joke.

Pablito would slip a tab of mescaline under his tongue and smile and see visions and nod and think, "Yeah, sister, the old man has spent more time with you in the last week than he spent with me in a year."

People were always saying to him, "Your dad, he's not stuffy like most ministers. That sermon he preached Sunday was so funny, I had tears in my eyes." Pablito would laugh and think yeah, he was funny, particularly

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that time his coffee had been laced with methamphetamines. The preacher had been going a hundred miles a minute. And he thought it was the anointing.

Upon his release from house arrest, Pablito moved out and messed up a housebreaking job one night — not noticing a secondary alarm system. All of a sudden, the lights went on. He thought one of his crazy friends had done it.

“Idiot!” he whispered. “Turn those off!”

But a very loud voice yelled “Freeze!”

Pablito froze.

Prison doors clang loudly when they shut. Prison guards have an attitude, too, about middle-class dopers from good families. They gave him a nickname he detested, “Preacher.”

One morning he woke up shirtless, cold and sticky on a mattress in the middle of a holding cell. He didn’t remember being put there.

H-A-T-E was tattooed across the fingers on one hand, L-O-V-E was tattooed on the other. His forearms were decorated with tattoos of the Zig-Zag man and a hand giving the finger. He didn’t remember getting any of the tattoos.

He had always steered away from them.

He slumped down, stunned, onto a blanket crumpled at one end of the mattress. He reached out, to put it around his chilled shoulders, but suddenly he was reeling from the stench.

The blanket was covered with vomit — his own.

Just like a dog, he was, returning to it.

Pablito doesn’t remember entire years of his life.

Sometimes things come back to him. "I been saved a lot of different times and I backslid, too. I've used churches. People would try to help me but I wasn't ..." His thoughts seem to drift far away. "I hurt a lot of people," he whispers. "I know people turned away from Jesus because of me."

At one of our rehab homes, he stands staring vacantly at a shelf packed with canned peaches. "Satan tells lies," he whispers. His voice is grave. His right hand tremors at times, another sign of a huffer — an inhalant freak. He has brain damage. He cannot remember people's names — particularly of those he has just met.

He stares in anguish at the peaches. "I hurt a whole lot of people who loved me and who respected my dad. He died of a stroke while I was doing time, but I don't remember anything about it at all. I am told I did not get to go to the funeral. My mother lives in Ohio. She and I don't talk much. My voice is hard to hear on the phone." His eye glistens with a tear and he turns away and lifts his hand to his cheek.

He looks 50, but he is only in his late 30s.

"I believe God has called me to preach," he rasps. "I ... I made God a promise once when I was about 10 or maybe 12. I can remember that totally. I was at this summer camp out near Yosemite. They gave this altar call and I felt God so strongly telling me to be a preacher, so I told Him I would. I felt it. I really did. But, now ..." Tears run down his face. He reaches for the can of peaches, then rather absently puts it back.

"I am sorry," he apologizes.

I believe Pablito hit bottom. He found himself with-

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out human hope. He is ashamed now. He is without natural resources. He has to depend on God. He is fighting his way back.

Even so, nobody in his family will trust him. His mother will not accept his collect phone calls. His sister says that he stole his mom's \$90,000 retirement annuity and blew it on drugs in a single month. As a result, the 67-year-old woman works as a greeter at Walmart.

Pablito has been an effective con-artist for years. He has betrayed everybody who ever tried to help him. But that is the story of every addict I have ever known. Nobody in my family could trust me. I stole everything from them that I could lay my hands on.

Now Pablito gets up at 6 a.m. and attends a daily prayer session from 6:30 to 7:30. After breakfast, he does kitchen chores and housecleaning. Bible study is from 11 to 1. Lunch follows, then more chores until 3:30, when there is another one-hour Bible study. More chores follow, then dinner, then the last Bible study/worship service of the day, from 7 to 9.

Pablito sits in a broken-down pew, waiting for the evening Bible service to begin. A thin kid with a beard slips in beside him, unsure of himself, but looking hopeful, like a beaten dog. Other men clutching Bibles fill the living room that has been converted into a sanctuary.

A young Hispanic man stands behind an electric piano. A kid who is about 16 sits behind a drum set with his eyes closed, his head bobbing to a silent beat. They are joined by an accordion player, then a man with a violin.

The group stands and sings "Amazing Grace," then

some worshipful choruses from a photocopied songsheet. When the singing ends, somebody stands and begins to preach. It is apparently his first time in the pulpit. "We all came close to being trophies in Satan's trophy room," he yells far too loudly for the small room. "To keep from ending up in hell, we have to come to Jesus!"

The keyboard player shouts "Amen!" So do several of the other men. Pablito stares at the wall, his thoughts intense, but distant.

"When you get back out on the street, man, Satan will try to use your weaknesses," the speaker says. "You've got to be strong spiritually. You've got to say, 'For me to go back to my old ways now would be like the passage in Second Peter:

"For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog turns back to his own vomit.'"

Stunned, Pablito looks up.

He knows all too well what it is like to return to his own vomit. His eyes fill with tears. Behind him, somebody reaches forward, puts a hand on his shoulder and begins to pray in tongues.

Nervously, Pablito steps out into the aisle. The guy praying for him follows, his hand still on his shoulder. For a preacher's kid, it seems odd Pablito does not know how to respond to an altar call. He kneels instead be-

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tween the rows of chairs. He is trembling. He presses his forehead to the floor and begins crying softly.

He shakes uncontrollably.

“I am sorry, Daddy,” he whispers over and over. “God help me, I am so sorry. I am so sorry. I am so sorry.”

Out of every 100 men who come to our rehab homes, a third or more stay and graduate. Of those who do, about 95 percent make it.

I believe Pablito will.

The Lord has taken so many ruined, wasted lives out of the darkness and turned them into magnificent treasures. What He looks for is a broken spirit and total repentance.

Pablito, kneeling in the aisle, has a long way to go.

His name means “Paulie.” I assume his real name is Pablo, which is “Paul.” Once long ago, there was another headstrong Paul that God had to humble, too. God called him for a purpose — dramatically on a road to Damascus, Syria.

He called him in a flash of light and thunder from the heavens. Paul had been a cold-blooded accessory to the murder of Stephen, Christianity’s first martyr. Now Paul was on his way to Damascus to find more Christians to arrest and drag back for execution.

Many would say he was unfit for service — much as you might say of Pablito.

But in Acts chapter 13:2-3, it is recorded that the Holy Spirit instructed the leaders to ordain the newly converted Paul and his co-worker, Barnabas “for the work whereunto I have called them.”

It says, that after they had fasted and prayed, the lead-

ers laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas, then they went ahead, launched them out, and sent the two on their way.

What followed turned the world upside down.

Modern civilization was directly affected by the obedience of one man. Paul traveled throughout the known world, spreading the Gospel to Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, Malta and Italy. Some believe he made it to Spain, France and even ancient Britain. He preached to kings, governors, soldiers, even to crowds picking up rocks to stone him to death.

He stayed in close touch with the many churches that he founded and today his letters to them make up much of the New Testament. Check out the full name of 2 Corinthians. It is actually "Paul's Second Letter to the Church at Corinth." Likewise with Philippi, Thessalonica, Colossi, Galatia, and Ephesus — look at the New Testament books for yourself.

God knew what He was doing when he chose Paul — although there remained bitter debate among some Christians over God's choice. Paul was not trusted by those who remembered his murderous past.

They would not have thought much of me, either. The people at my parents' traditional little church were quite nervous about me.

But it is a blessing that they did not like me.

I think back to 30 years of our ministry, and how God pushed me to reach out to others that polite churches could not handle.

It started when Nicky Cruz and I were holding large crusades. We were having enormous success and attracting a lot of attention from the community, the press and

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the people who packed our meetings. Many were coming up and getting saved. But instead of rejoicing, somehow there was a quenching taking place inside of me. I would go to my hotel room and I would fall on my face and I'd begin to cry,

Nicky began to notice that something was wrong. He asked, "Sonny, what's bugging you?"

I didn't understand it myself. I said, "I don't know. I don't understand. OK, Nicky, it's like this. Instead of being happy and rejoicing for what God is doing in our meetings, somehow there is an emptiness inside of me, and a void."

"Sonny," said Nicky, his voice somber, "you better get hold of God and find out what it's all about, we can't go on like this."

So I decided to go to California where my wife and I had an apartment. I had attended Bible school there.

I had to find out why I was feeling the way I was.

When I arrived in California, I told my wife, "Julie," I said, "I'm going to get a motel room, and separate myself and I'm going to get hold of God. I'm going to find out what's wrong. I need to hear from Him."

So I found a room.

And as I was praying, I cried out, "Lord, why do I feel the way I do? I feel so bad. What's the matter with me?"

I think I had been there about two days. All of a sudden, God spoke to me. He spoke to my heart so clearly that there was no mistaking His voice. "The reason why you feel the way you do, is because you're out of My perfect will."

“What? No!” I cried. “How?” I had done everything required of me. I had gone to Bible school so I could be qualified to preach. I had submitted myself to my spiritual leaders. I was holding crusades with Nicky Cruz. What had I done wrong?

“Lord,” I prayed, “what do you think I’m doing? I mean I’ve been traveling all over the country. I leave my wife alone in California and hold crusades with Nicky. I mean I’m doing your work! What else do you want me to do?”

“You’re involved in doing My work,” He said, “but you’re not in My perfect will.”

I remember asking Him a very important question, “Lord, what is your perfect will?”

And as soon as I asked Him that, He responded so clearly. “I want you to open up a church, and I am going to fill it up with drug addicts and their families, and it’s going to be a lighthouse, and a testimony that’s going to glorify My Name around the world.”

You may think I got excited, but I didn’t.

“Oh no,” I said. *He wants me to be a pastor.*

A pastor is a lot different than being an evangelist. A traveling evangelist can hit and run. A pastor has to stay and pick up the pieces.

So, instead of getting excited, I was actually discouraged. I went back home, and Julie was there waiting for me, eagerly wanting to know what had happened.

“Any word from the Lord?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I muttered. “He spoke to me all right.”

“What did He say?” she asked. “Come on, tell me, tell me!”

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I wanted to make it sound really gruesome, so I told her, "He wants me to open up a junkie church."

"A what?"

"A junkie church. A drug addict church."

"Well!" she said, her voice puzzled. "I've never heard of such a thing."

"I've never heard of it, either," I grumbled, "but that's what He wants me to do."

"Oh, well," Julie exclaimed. "That's wonderful! Now I can have you home most of the time," Then she asked me, "where are we supposed to open up this church?"

Suddenly, it hit me. "I forgot to ask," I admitted.

I thought about it. "Well, it has to be in New York City. I know the guys in New York — the drug addicts. I know all the hang outs. That's my hometown, and I know it inside out. It has to be New York City."

So I said, "Julie, you stay here, and I'll do like John the Baptist, and I'll go and prepare the way, and then I'll send for you."

I went on to New York City.

I went to all the drug addicts that I knew and I started telling them, "Hey man, what, guess what? We're going to open up a church and it's going to be your church, for you guys, man."

"Really?"

"Yeah," I grinned.

I rented a storefront and told them, "Listen, we've got to paint this church. I want you to go out and get some paint." They all went out and they got paint. They brought back all kinds of things. In fact, I didn't even want to ask them where they got some of it.

But they came back all excited, "Hey, man, we got some paint, and look what else we got! We've got carpeting! And this is going to be our church."

So, here I am in New York City, bragging about how I'm going to take the city for Jesus — and how I'm going to work with all these drug addicts.

Then I began to feel a quenching, the same that I had felt when I was with Nicky.

"Oh no," I mumbled, "what's happening now?"

So, I got on my knees again and I began to pray: "Lord, why do I feel the way I do? You told me to come to New York. Here I am."

He spoke to me and said, "I didn't tell you to come to New York."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"No," said the Lord, "you told yourself to come to New York."

So, here I was out of the perfect will of God again. What did I do? I called my wife.

"Julie," I sighed.

"Oh, Sonny!" she said all bright and cheery. "Hey, I'm all packed and ready to go."

"Julie," I said, "you better unpack. I'm coming home." I knew that if I was out of God's will, there was no sense for me to just keep on going. I went back to the guys and told them, "Guys, I'm sorry. I made a mistake."

"But," they said, "what about our church?"

"You know what, man?" I told them, "I blew it. I made a mistake. I'll come another time. Take those things back where you got them. I'll see you."

So, on the first plane I could catch, I was on my way

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out of New York City. En route to Los Angeles, I was trying to think: *where did God want me to start this junkie church?*

It couldn't be in L.A. There was no way that I could do it there. The whole culture was different. I was from Brooklyn and although I was raised with Italians and Puerto Ricans, in L.A. everybody Hispanic that I knew was Chicano — of Mexican descent. You might think it's the same thing, but it would be like telling a German that he was no different than an Austrian — since they all speak German.

I mean, try telling a Scotsman that he is the same thing as an Irishman just because they speak English and come from the British Isles. You will have a fight on your hands. The same is very true of Hispanics. Guatemalans have their own heritage and do not appreciate it if you assume they are, say, from Mexico. Likewise, Mexicans don't want anybody assuming that they think or act just like Cubans or Spaniards.

So I could not imagine that a New Yorker with a thick "Noo Yawk" accent could possibly relate to anybody in Los Angeles. In East L.A., they talked a street slang that I didn't even try to understand. I felt like a square in L.A. In New York I knew everything. I was an outsider in Los Angeles.

So, on the plane, coming to Los Angeles, I didn't know what I was going to do. I sure didn't know what I was going to tell my wife.

But as soon as I set foot on the ground at Los Angeles International Airport, I felt the power of God from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. All of a

sudden God began to speak to me, and said, "This is the place where you said you couldn't do it. So, it is the place to which I have called you, because you're not going to do the work. I am going to do it through you."

Well, the rest is history.

This was God's calling. It wasn't a ministry that I chose. And so, I believe, it will be with you.

I believe there are some people reading this book whose lives may be in a state of indecision. I tell you, it is not God's will for you to be like that. I believe that God wants to reveal His divine will for your life. Be open and ready to receive it.

Be ready to obey it.

Like Pablito, you had better get down and humble yourself. Seek Him. God's call is always clear, definite and unmistakable. When He speaks, you will know it—if you are willing to listen.

Keep in mind that throughout the Bible, God called unlikely people — like you and me. So, if you feel you don't qualify, that may be your first confirmation.

Moses tried to convince God that he was incapable of delivering Israel. Guilty of manslaughter, he had been a fugitive — hiding out in the wilderness, working as a shepherd, married to a desert chieftain's daughter.

The Lord told him in Exodus 3:

"Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou may bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto God, Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and

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that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? They will not believe me, nor harken unto my voice, for they will say The Lord has not appeared unto thee."

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, and told him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Gideon basically exclaimed: "Who me?"

Actually his reply was,

"Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel, behold my family is the poorest in Manassah, and I am the least in my father's house."

But nevertheless God called him.

Samuel, the great judge of Israel, at 12 years old was astonished that God would call him.

When the children of Israel assembled for the anointing of the first King of Israel, young Saul was nowhere to be found. He was so shy that he hid in a pile of luggage.

And Jeremiah, who became a bold prophet of God felt afraid and inadequate when he was called. God said to him:

"Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, and before thou came forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

Notice how Jeremiah responded:

SONNY ARGUINZONI

“O God, I cannot speak for I am a child.”

But the Lord said,

“Say not I am a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shalt send thee, and whatsoever I command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee.”

Over and over in the Word of God you find great people who God chose. Each had a sense of inadequacy and sorrow and even fear.

Like Pablito felt.

Like I felt.

And you?

What is He saying to you right now?

Chapter 15

Now, into the streets

Live street dramas are incredibly effective tools.

One play that we use is a gritty presentation called *Slippin' Into Darkness*. It includes scenes of violence perpetrated by actors using real guns — loaded with blanks.

The darkness in the title refers to gang life. The idea is to enlighten young gangsters and wannabes who get so pumped up and involved in violence they can't see what is really happening. Our play presents gang life in a way that allows kids to take a step back and take a good look at what they are doing.

Slippin' Into Darkness deals with suicide, murder, gang warfare, the rape and degradation of girl gang members, and the death of innocents. The last line of the play is an invitation to find redemption through Jesus. Of course, that is what Victory Outreach is all about.

Well, we have put this play on in all sorts of places

— prisons, parks, municipal auditoriums, you name it. In San Jose, we have Pastor Ed with the *The Duke of Earl I & II*.

Hundreds have come to the Lord through these live presentations. I have heard kids talk about being in the Bloods or the Crips or other gangs, sporting their colors, witnessing gang initiations, throwing the gang signs, and riding along on drive-by shootings. But something changed when they saw one of our dramas.

Another live drama we do is called *Ain't No Sunshine in the 'Hood*. It is the story of a father, a heroin addict, who beats his wife; a brother who kills his younger brother because he's part of a rival gang; an innocent child who dies because she's caught at a gang's battleground; and a girl who wants to leave gang life, but is killed before she can.

Street kids' reaction to these plays is astonishing at times. This is a generation raised on million-dollar TV music videos and fast-action movies. They won't pause to listen to sermons.

We have learned that a crowd will gather for a live drama and they will brush on past a street preacher on a megaphone passing out tracts.

Street kids really respond to drama. They laugh, cheer and become deathly silent as the action unfolds. The final scene always offers them a chance to change their lives by coming forward to pray with cast members or staff. Dozens of youth always flock to the front.

It is something to see. Some kneel with Victory Outreach counselors. Others cry while standing beside family and friends. Some speak with the actors.

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In our play *Cold City Dreams*, a girl living in an inner-city neighborhood commits suicide after being raped by her stepfather.

With the plays, we have always hoped to paint a vivid image of how gang lifestyles destroy lives. We present a drama that gives a sermon. A lot of the time, when a kid is involved in the real-life version, they do not realize that they're trapped in a nightmare. Until they see themselves on stage, they don't realize what a horrible situation they're in — and that there is a way out.

One of our drama teams puts on a play called *Straight From the 'Hood*. One weekend, instead of putting it on in some neighborhood park or a high school auditorium, we made the mistake of scheduling it at a very conservative church.

The service started like every one had since the 1940's. The congregation sang from their hymnals, good old standards with phrases that nobody understood anymore, then a Brother Herschel prayed in a kind of depressing monotone for a long list of people who were very ill and obviously not expected to live much longer.

He used lots of traditional, flowery language and plenty of thee's and thou's, as if he was speaking to Somebody who only understood the Authorized King James Version of the Bible.

Why do some people think God speaks Old English? Do they have the Almighty confused with William Shakespeare?

Then the congregation sang another song from their hymnals. Announcements were given, including a sister standing and inviting everyone in the quilting circle to

come to the pie social. Then they had another prayer and passed the offering. The preacher stood and announced that it was time for the special program. Then he sat down.

The lights dimmed. And here comes Victory Outreach. *Talk about shock therapy.*

Man, our people put that play on — our guys running down the aisles with guns blazing — *pow, pow, pow, pow, pow* — and then the dancing, and the rock music and guys shooting drugs and killing people and blood. Yes, there was stage blood being spilled on this nice, conservative church's platform and not just a little. The place was splattered with blood.

Our play came to its dramatic climax. We had an altar call and a crowd of kids got saved — I mean they were streaming down the aisle, crying and asking God to forgive them.

But the pastor was not looking at the kids. He was worried about Brother Herschel and Sister Maud clutching her purse and adjusting her bifocals. This church was used to hiding in their safe little Christian subculture. And they were *offended*.

So, the preacher gets up, and says, "Well. Let me just finish by saying a prayer.

"Ahem —" he clears his throat. "God, we thank You Lord for being with us today. And we thank You for Your grace even though these methods are very unconventional and they're not pleasing before Your sight, O Lord.

"But Lord, you're a merciful and forgiving God, and you're a gracious God and so we thank You nevertheless for the good motives of these ghetto dwellers."

Huh? Here were our guys and girls who had just

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poured out their lives on his stage and prompted a revival among his youth group. But his safe little corner church was just too horrified by us. I'm not putting these churches down or their pastors, either, because that would be the wrong thing for us to do.

These are men of God. Their church members love Jesus and come to church regularly. But they're not involved in the ministry of reaching the inner city like we are. They don't understand those methods of reaching today's street kids and truly changing lives.

The people huddled in the pews of these churches are too religious to be effective in reaching sinners anymore. That's why most of their growth comes from recruiting members from other churches.

Most of their effort goes into getting Christians who already tithe and know the Lord to switch locations.

That's why these churches have a hard time evangelizing. They have forgotten how. And frankly, they have no idea of what to do with the lost if they did come down the aisle and ask to become members.

I'll give you another example. My wife was at a convention and she spoke about all her years in rehabilitation work. She told about bringing people into our house, even with our kids still young and growing up.

That stunned the group.

Never mind the benefits of exposing your children at a very early age to the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit at work. Never mind the testimony of turning your three-year-old's safety over to Jesus and just trusting the Lord to surround that little child with a hedge of thorns and to let that little baby be a powerful witness to the

drug addicts who are holding him or loving on her.

The idea was just too shocking.

I mean, we can trust God as long as we don't really share our private lives with sinners. We've got to keep our families out of it — safely hidden in the suburbs so our 10-year-old daughters can be innocent and never see a painted-up, messed-up, heartbroken street hooker come to Jesus in their living room.

So, one of the other speakers got up in the next session and she started contradicting everything that Julie had said. She said, "You know, we heard that some people think that you have to go and have people come into your home to reach the inner city. I don't suggest or recommend anybody doing that because those are dangerous people, and horrible people. You don't want them around your kids. You've got to protect your children. Don't be irresponsible by bringing your kids into a dangerous situation."

"What if one of those people would kill your whole family? I think you should be detached and professional in dealing with this sort of thing. You should live far away and never allow yourself to become emotionally involved."

"Certainly you would not bring prostitutes and drug addicts and criminals into your house. I don't think you have to go that far."

"Another thing, when you go out there into those streets, be sure you don't wear any jewelry or anything like that when you go to evangelize. Those people are criminals out there."

Praise God that I wasn't there when that woman got up. But let me tell you what happened.

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A black woman who must have been from an inner city ministry somewhere stood and said, "I don't agree with you, sister." The room got still.

"I agree with Sister Arguinzoni and what she said," said this sister. "If you come down to our neighborhood in the inner city, then you better be ready to get your hands dirty, and you be ready to come down there and be fellowshiping with them, and you'd better be willing to trust God to help you take them into your house."

She is so right.

But I don't think she got through. The "expert" opened up her textbook and began citing Jung and Skinner and the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

I just wish she would have tried citing the Woman at the Well, our MacArthur Park barber, the kick-boxers to the rich and famous, and certainly the Apostle Paul.

But I must stop myself in mid-sentence here.

I must not become critical and judgmental. We cannot become so proud that we are the only ministry that hangs out with dopers, we're the only ones that take our ministry to the streets. You know, I like to hang out with the guys from the rehab home. I talk to them and sit down with them. They're part of the family of God. They're not strangers anymore. They're not just converts.

They're potential men and women of God who He is raising up. They are part of the family of God that He's using to turn the inner cities around.

Some religious experts will never understand. They will sit at their overhead projectors and drone on as they draw diagrams about the symbolisms of Melchisedek. Their congregations will doze, but feel holy that they

have put in another Sunday trying to earn their salvation by enduring a sermon that has nothing to do with anybody. The church committee meetings will drag on. The reports to headquarters will come in on schedule — and join the dusty pile of other paperwork.

Those other people with their techniques are sincere servants of God. They're men and women who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

No, they don't understand what our ministry is all about. No, they don't seem to get anywhere reaching the inner city people that we touch. Yet, God wants us to be humble and teachable so we can share what we have learned. *We must continue to learn, too.*

As I write this, we have just had a crusade in Mexicali, Mexico. We had 20,000 people showing up for services and were shaking up the whole city.

It was led by just one guy, one of our former street dudes who came up through a rehab home. He got Nicky Cruz to come speak. His team put posters all over that city. Even the politicians called him and said, "We've never seen anybody so thoroughly promote any event. You saturated our city with those posters. By the way, we want you to take them down when you're finished."

Well, our guy surprised them. After the crusade, all over the city he had his volunteers take them down. It blew the minds of those Mexican politicians.

A bunch of Los Angeles dudes actually kept a promise. Circuses don't take down their posters when the show is over. Professional wrestling promoters don't go down and remove all their posters.

But we said we would, and we did.

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"I've never seen anything like that," one of the politicians told our guy.

Continue to pray that the Lord will continue to show us the effective methods to use as the cities change and as the culture continues to change around us. We have to be willing to go out at midnight to evangelize.

"At midnight?" the lady at the convention might protest. "Are you crazy? And where are you going to take us at midnight?"

Well, we're going to take you to where the prostitutes are. "*Are you insane?*"

No, we get teams together to evangelize at midnight to prostitutes because that's when prostitutes come out.

As I look back two years ago when I was in my hotel room in Dallas, Texas, burdened for the future of our ministry, I could envision the potential of Victory Outreach penetrating new cities and countries worldwide; but our financial base, being limited, was tying our hands.

There was an urgency in my spirit to strengthen the financial future of our ministry. It was then and in that state of urgency that God spoke to me and gave me the "United We Can" plan for our ministry.

As I reflect back, I can truly say that God has been faithful to His promises. We have been experiencing a breakthrough in financial giving, inner city evangelism, global church planting and unity within our fellowship, unlike anything we have ever experienced before.

Our vision, from the small beginning in East L.A., is still the same. It has not changed; if anything, it has gotten bigger. Today we are faced with the challenge of planting 1,000 churches by the year 2000. By all human rea-

soning, it would be impossible for us to accomplish such a task. But when I think about how great God is and how He has faithfully led us every step of the way, I say that nothing is impossible for Him. "If God be for us, (Victory Outreach), who can be against us!"

Very soon we will be building our Victory Outreach International World Headquarters. We will have offices for international administration purposes that will meet the needs for world missions.

This past year our Victory Outreach School of Ministry has launched extensions throughout our ministry in order to provide Pastoral and Missionary training. It is essential for every couple that is launched, to be fully equipped to win their city.

Our Special Service Ministries has grown and many men and women are catching the vision. God has been faithful to us in giving us the "Treasures out of Darkness" Now we must continue to be faithful to the heavenly promise that He has given us in Isaiah 54:2-3, "Enlarge the place of your tent; stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; spare not. Lengthen your cords, and straighten your pegs. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left. And your descendants will possess nations, and they will resettle the desolate cities." American Standard Version.

Women's Ministries has enthusiastically developed strong women to disciple young ladies desiring ministry. Their zealous evangelism takes them into the streets late in the evening to win "the precious life". Throughout each local church women are finding their place and using their gifts to advance the vision of this ministry.

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With our Youth Ministry rapidly growing and our Street Children's Ministry in infancy, we must build and have a solid future for this upcoming generation of disciples, who will continue to reach the inner cities and ghettos of the world.

We need to have the right messengers. We need to continue to equip our people through ministers' training, regional conferences, men's discipleship, women in ministry — all dedicated to our people so that they can do the work of the ministry.

Pray for our pastors and leaders that they will be able to spend quality time with those who have potential. We've got to get down and get hold of those people and impart to them what God has placed in us.

Pray that we will not lose our radical enthusiasm. I find that, as any church grows, we tend to become institutionalized. As the programs grow and the complexity of the outreach increases, we can very easily turn into the sleepy, safe church on the corner.

Pray that we will raise up and equip worship leaders and effective children's ministers and rehab staff. Pray for our administrative workers, for our home Bible fellowships, for our pastors and evangelists and teachers and the people doing cross-cultural equipping for our missionaries.

Pray for the quality of our leaders — that we never become so polished and "professional" that we are comfortable and full of criticism and judgment and pride.

The more we learn of Jesus, the more humble we must become. With our eyes on Him, we must recognize that we will always have a lot more to learn.

SONNY ARGUINZONI

Pray that we will have a servant's attitude.

And pray for us that we do not lose sight of the vision. Pray that you can internalize the vision into your own life.

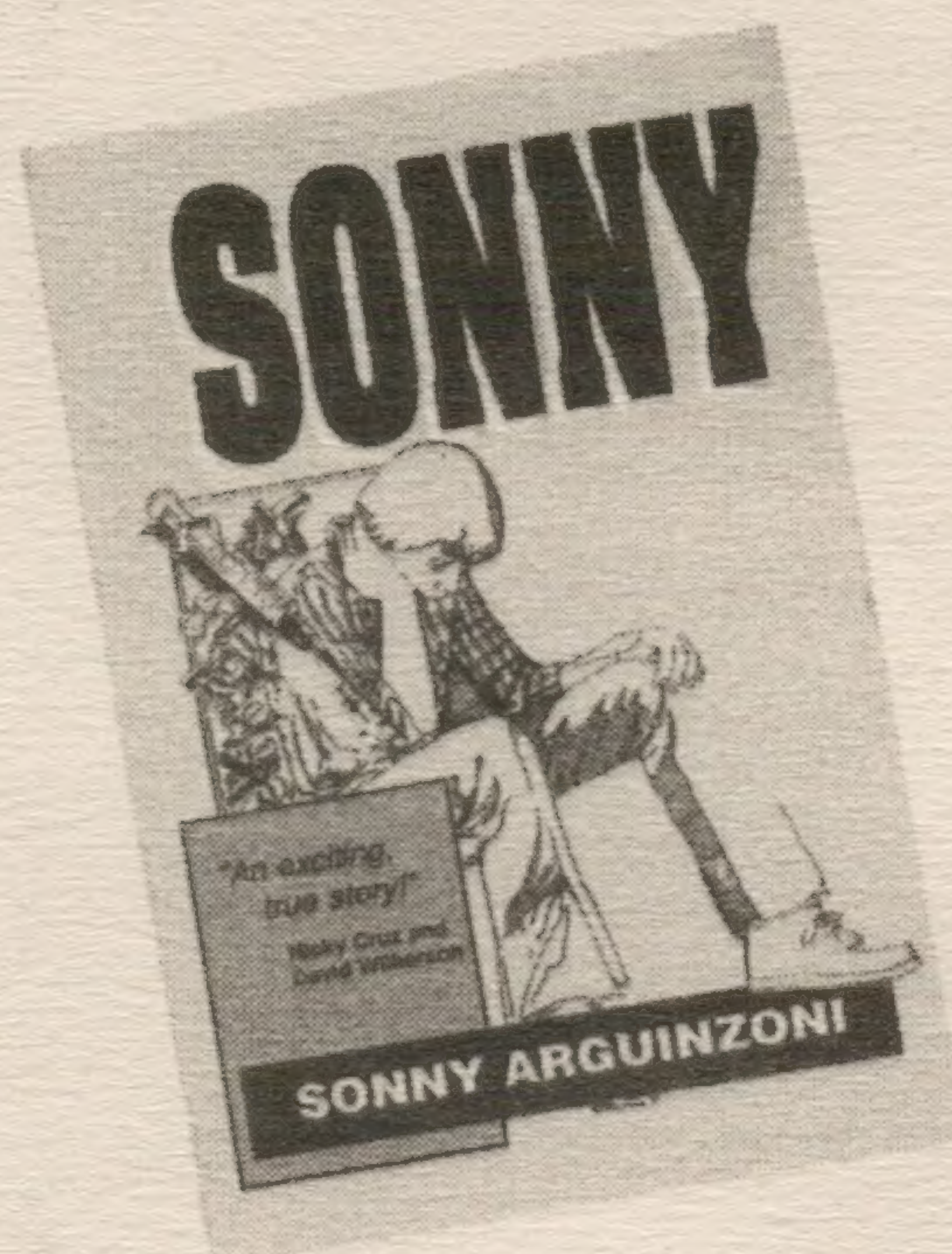
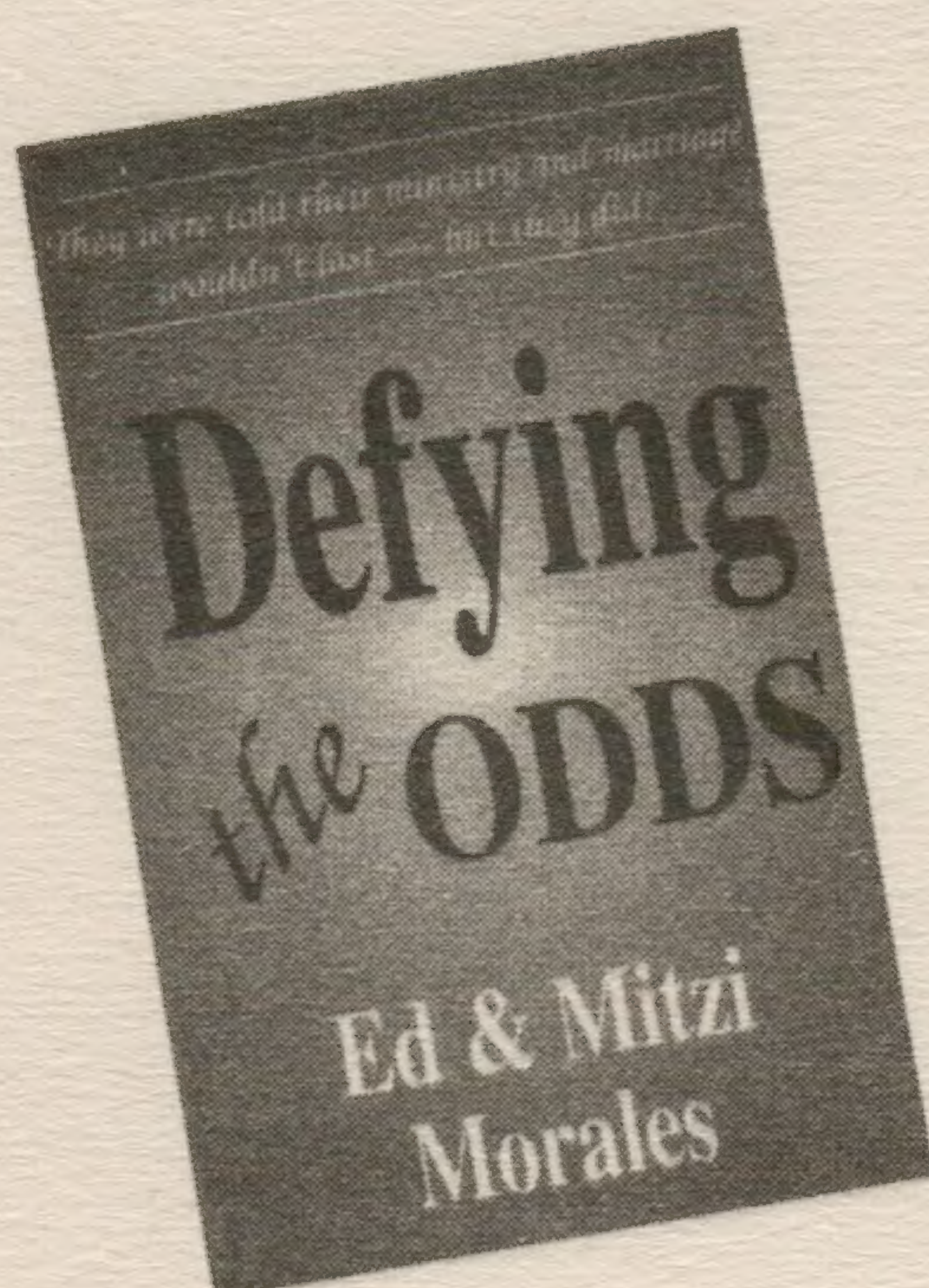
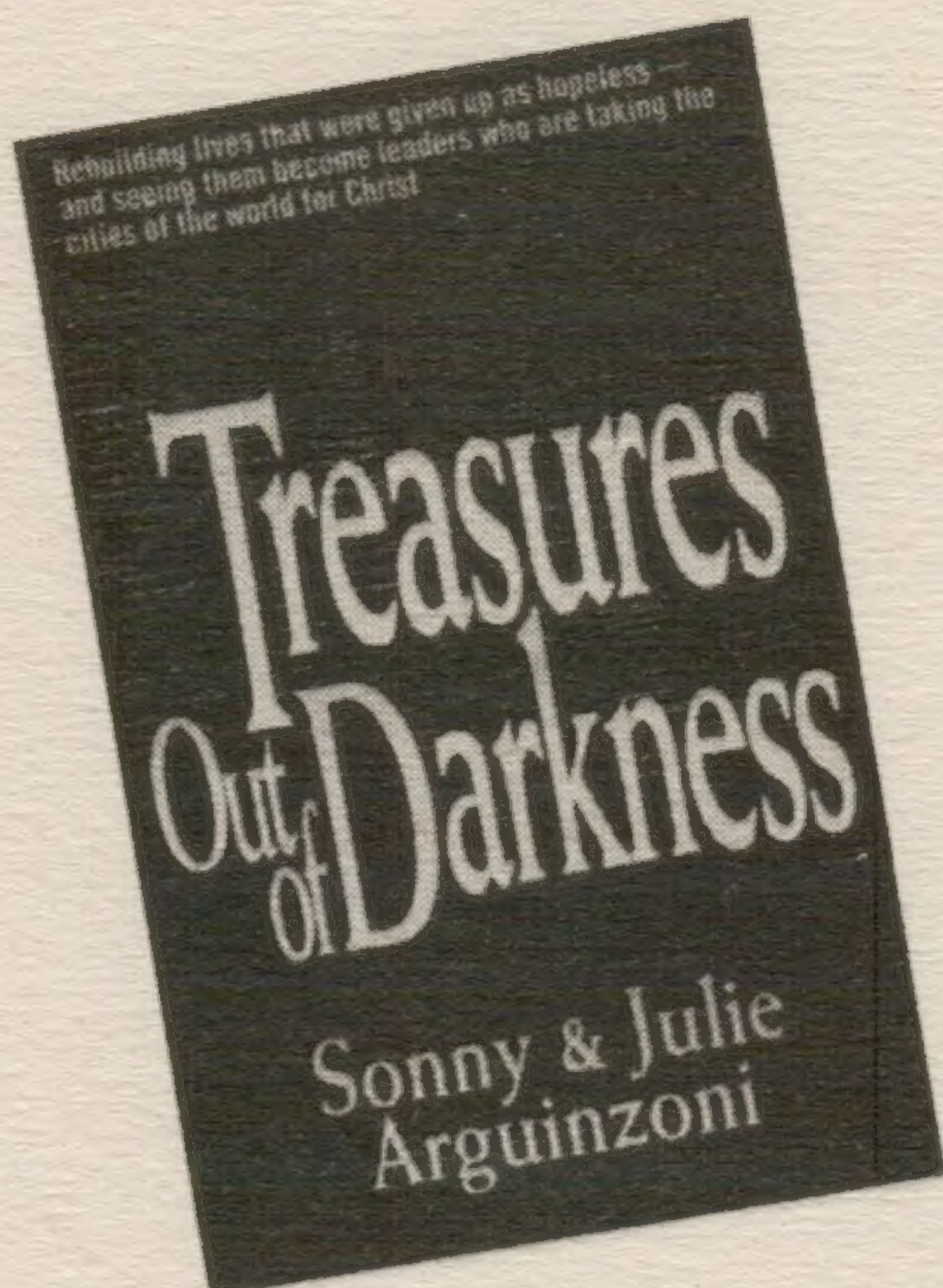
That's what it's all about.

Isn't it simple? Now, go out and do it, man.

Get out there and get involved in people's lives. Get hold of it.

I leave you with these words from our Lord Jesus Christ that are found in John 9:4, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." Whatever we do for the Lord, we must do it now!

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*It sounds like a strategy
doomed to fail ...*

INTERPRETING



THE VISION

Take a rowdy bunch of drug addicts, prostitutes and tattooed gang members, convert them to Christianity and train them in the Scriptures. Then send them back out on the streets to pioneer urban churches.

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